

Mutiny in Hunan: Writing and Rewriting the “Warlord Era” in Early Republican Chinese History

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines a 1920 mutiny in Pingjiang County, Hunan Province, as a way of challenging the dominant narrative of the early republican period of Chinese history, often called the “Warlord Era.” The mutiny precipitated a change of power from Tan Yankai, a classically trained elite of the pre-imperial era, to Zhao Hengti, who had undergone military training in Japan. Conventional histories interpret this transition as Zhao having betrayed his erstwhile superior Tan, epitomizing the rise of warlordism and the disintegration of traditional civilian administration; this dissertation challenges these claims by showing that Tan and Zhao were not enemies in 1920, and that no such betrayal occurred.

These same histories also claim that local governance during this period was fundamentally broken, necessitating the revolutionary party-state of the KMT and CCP to centralize power and restore order. Though this was undeniably a period of political turmoil, with endemic low-level armed conflict, this dissertation juxtaposes unpublished material with two of the more influential histories of the era to show how this narrative has been exaggerated to serve political aims. Gradual reform and innovations like federalism have been excluded from memories of the era in favor of a return to highly centralized, autocratic rule. Tan, Zhao, and their peers were unable to adapt to the emerging mass politics of their era, and thus did not achieve the necessary publicity to make their achievements more well-known.

Another dimension to the dissertation is its local character. At the turn of the twentieth century, Hunan was still an internal frontier, far from the more cosmopolitan coast. Moreover, it lay at the crossroads between north and south, making it geostrategically important for all those who wished to militarily conquer the whole of the former Qing empire. Those from the province, like Tan and Zhao, were convinced of their homeland’s importance, and, cognizant of the prominent political role that their predecessors played in nineteenth century, sought to emulate their example through good governance and innovative politics.

By redirecting our attention to these local successes, however limited, and reframing our interpretation of the 1920 mutiny, this dissertation argues against the revolutionary paradigm of Chinese history to highlight an alternative possibility for how local governance could have worked, demonstrates how elite culture enabled the success of Qing elites like Tan and Zhao while preventing their later success in the mass politics era, and suggests new possibilities for future research on the politics of early Republican China.

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Dedication

For Grace,
in gratitude,
with love

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Introduction: How Reinterpreting a Mutiny Reframes Modern Chinese History

On November 25th, 1920, Hunan Governor Tan Yankai (1880-1930) resigned from office and boarded a boat that would take him to Shanghai. Mutineers from Pingjiang, less than 80 miles away from the capital of Changsha, were approaching; he had no other way of placating their demands but to flee into exile. Tan had come into office in July of that same year for his third tenure as governor since the 1911 Revolution; now he was being forced to leave his home province in humiliation. Authority would pass on to his supposed subordinate, Zhao Hengti (1880-1971), whose reign over Hunan would last for six years.

This dissertation argues that descriptions of this specific episode in conventional narratives of China's early republic epitomizes the manner in which the era as a whole has been characterized. These portrayals emphasize the political turmoil and social disorder of the period, with the republican ideals of the 1911 Revolution appearing to be little more than flimsy excuses used by various strongmen to selfishly hoard power and war with others over territory and resources. Though there were efforts to implement national and provincial constitutions, and proposals for new forms of governance like federalism, these all resulted in failure. The betrayal of weak civilian bureaucrats like Tan by their ostensible military subordinates seemed so prevalent that the era was dubbed and caricatured as the "Warlord Period" of modern Chinese history. This periodization consciously evokes previous eras of national disorder, like the Warring States (475 BC – 221 BC), Three Kingdoms (220-280), or Five Dynasties and Sixteen Kingdoms (907-979).

Given the above, it would be far too easy to see the "Warlord Period" as merely a brief and chaotic interregnum between a centralized imperial system that ended in 1911 and a centralized party state that achieved a partial reunification in 1926. This would be a mistake, as it locks our understanding of what China is, was, and could possibly become into a unitary and unchanging ideal. What happens when this coherent narrative of progress is temporarily set aside? Is it possible that this period of confusion disguises alternative proposals for how the Chinese state can be rethought? This dissertation contends that the revolutionary Leninist party-state that partially triumphed in the late 1920s and achieved near-total victory in 1949 was not the only possible conclusion for how this story would develop. Military conquest, revolutionary violence, and the radical transformation of society were also not necessarily the only methods by which the nation could become stronger. Yet this teleology persists.

This dissertation challenges this dominant narrative by arguing that 1920 mutiny and transition of power described above occurred because Tan Yankai was unable to adequately demonstrate a responsiveness to the new demands of mass politics, not because his policies of gradual reform were inherently flawed. Revolutionary historiography has attributed the fall of Tan and regimes like his to the moral bankruptcy and factionalism intrinsic to the elite class to which they belonged, as political leadership swiftly devolved into warlordism. Deconstructing these narratives by looking at how they have emphasized the failures of elite reform constitutes the first step in moving beyond the revolutionary paradigm. This dissertation joins recent efforts at deconstruction with materials concerning provincial governance in Hunan to show some of the limited and overlooked successes enjoyed by elite-run administrations, like that of Tan, during this period of time. By demonstrating that opposition to these regimes, as

epitomized by the 1920 mutiny, was less connected with cultural or ideological concerns like revolution, and more a function of factional infighting and material demands like troop pay, this dissertation argues for a reconceptualization of early Republican China that highlights the potential for gradual reform.

Politics during this period was dominated by the same elites who had who had held a monopoly on the practice of late Qing governance. Their reliance on extant social networks and pre-revolution culture is often blamed for their eventual failures, as in the case of Tan Yankai, who embodies the stereotypical elite, more concerned with preserving the traditions of the past than modernizing state and society. However, if the 1920 mutiny and Tan's subsequent exile are attributed to material and contingent factors rather than any underlying flaws of elite-led reform, an alternative to the revolutionary teleology begins to emerge. Tan was forced to leave because of discontent among lower-level soldiers and internal conflicts within his coalition. This is not to say that he never committed political errors or always governed well, but that his errors should not be conflated with the failures of his policies or disinterest in his experiments with federalism. His inability to successfully appeal to, harness, and manage the support of his soldiers mirrored and presaged the mass politics which would shortly emerge.

This widening chasm between elites and masses is worth noting, and it is important to use class to disaggregate the militarism of the age. While the conventional narrative blames elite strongmen for the chaotic musical chairs of "warlord" politics, this dissertation shows that, at least in the case of Hunan, soldiers wielded a great deal of power in causing transitions in power at the top. This was true for Tan Yankai's initial accession in 1911 as well as his departure from the governorship nine years later. Such soldiers, described in greater detail by Diana Lary, were very different from the provincial elites who had often received modern educational training at military academies, including those in Japan, and constituted the majority of the officers at the top.¹ The material motivations of these soldiers were not necessarily aligned with the political reform efforts of the elites who were their ostensible superiors; it was the periods of greatest discord which provoked elite turnover.

The significance of this gap is barely featured in the two influential histories of early Republican politics that have constructed the conventional narrative of the "Warlord Era," which have instead emphasized the necessity and inevitability of revolution. The first of these, *Chinese Political History in the Past Thirty Years* [最近三十年中国政治史] was published in 1930 and written by Li Jiannong (1880-1963); it condemns all non-revolutionary efforts to modernize China as retrograde and mistaken, asserting the teleology of the conventional narrative. The second, *Anecdotes of the Beiyang Warlord Domination Period* [北洋軍閥統治時期史話] by Tao Juyin (1898-1989), first published in 1957, presents a sensationalistic account of warlord factionalism in order to underscore the necessity for unity and centralized rule. Both histories attribute the 1920 mutiny to Tan's mistakes, rather than mass discontent, as an example of the elite failures of the era. The non-revolutionary character of Tan and unsuccessful regimes like his serves to emphasize the positive aspects of what came after.

Just as recent scholarship on the 1898 reforms of the late Qing argues that that the traditional outcome-based focus on their failure prevents careful consideration of their

¹ Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers, 1911-1937* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

possibilities, this dissertation suggests how the conventional narrative of the excesses of the “Warlord Period” precludes a full consideration for its achievements, however partial.² Other historians have begun to make similar claims: David Strand, for example, convincingly describes a level of popular engagement with politics during this time period that constitutes an underappreciated degree of progress away from the autocracy of the past, and that laid the foundation for what was to come.³ This dissertation adds to this body of scholarship by using previously unpublished archival sources to suggest how, in contrast to the conventional narrative, provincial governance thrived, often justifying its policies based upon what has been mistakenly perceived to be empty laws like local constitutions. The “Warlord Period” warrants reexamination that both accounts for and moves beyond the tropes of the conventional narrative.

Wen and Wu in Chinese History

The 1920 mutiny is often used as an illustration of the overpowering of a civilian bureaucrat by a military strongman, and the bullying of the weak civilian (like Tan) by the military is arguably the oldest and most potent example of this trope for the warlord era. However, this is an oversimplification. Cultural understandings about the establishment of the Chinese polity have been framed by representations of “the cultural” (*wen*) and “the martial” (*wu*) and require an appreciation of the historical significance of these tropes in popular understandings of China’s past. As recounted in the Book of Rites, one of the five Confucian classics that predate the 221 BCE imperial unification, “King Wen (of Zhou) used culture to rule and King Wu (of Zhou) used military power.”⁴ The talent of King Wen was in his benevolence and civility, which had the power to transform rivals into allies while maintaining harmony over all he ruled. In contrast, his son King Wu was skilled at war, and led his family to supremacy through the conquest of others. These two figures and the values they epitomize articulate how *wen* and *wu* were often framed as opposing ideals, around which cultural, social, and political organizations would structure themselves. However, as noted by Kai Filippiak, though “Chinese administrations, for example, made a clear distinction between civil and military officials (*wenguan/wuguan*),”⁵ neither was truly given primacy over the other in a theoretical sense. That is to say, both were idealized as appropriate and legitimate policy orientations by the various governments that ruled China in the thousands of years afterwards. This included the campaigns to unify the Chinese polity by various armies during periods of disorder (*luan*), as well as efforts by the Chinese state to manage society during times of peace.⁶ Neither could function without the other; both were necessary for success.

² For one example of this, see Rebecca Karl and Peter Zarrow, eds., *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³ David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley CA.: University of California Press, 2011).

⁴ Quoted and translated by Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, “Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing ‘Wen’ and ‘Wu’,” in *East Asian History*, no. 8, (December 1994), 135-148, 140. Original: 文王以文治，武王以武治

⁵ Kai Filippiak, “Introduction: Civil-Military Relations in Chinese History,” in Kai Filippiak, ed. *Civil-Military Relations in Chinese History: From Ancient China to the Communist Takeover*, (Routledge, 2015), 1-17, 4.

⁶ James Tong, *Disorder Under Heaven: Collective Violence in the Ming Dynasty* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

While the relative balance between the two values would wax and wane, following the Song Dynasty (960-1279), *wen* began to gain greater prominence and preeminence over *wu*. As Joanna Waley-Cohen notes, this is demonstrated by the fact that “classical education rather than military achievement had traditionally [become] the path to political power.”⁷ This shift can also be seen in the oft-quoted four-character phrase “place greater value on *wen* than on *wu*,” which gained in popularity after this period.⁸ Though, as Nicolas Schillinger notes, far too much can be read into this phrase that itself cannot be concretely connected to state policy, its prevalence is indicative.⁹ Another popular saying also illustrates this post-Song shift: “good iron is not used for nails, good men do not serve as soldiers.” This adage, which was particularly common in more affluent areas, further suggests the low social standing of soldiers during the later imperial period. By implication, those subscribing to this philosophy were of the correct morality, education, and upbringing, and would therefore be actively discouraged from seeking *wu*-oriented careers.¹⁰

By the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), norms were beginning to shift as emperors encouraged and inculcated more *wu* characteristics like courage, physical fitness, and determination among the Manchu elite who ruled the empire. The policies of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735-1796) exemplify this rebalancing: he severely punished Manchu and Mongolian officials who did not meet his standard for skills like archery, and did his best to exemplify the fighting tradition he wanted his officers to emulate by staging annual hunts.¹¹ Qianlong also sent his armies on lengthy and expensive campaigns of conquest and pacification that expanded the borders of his empire, then made sure that his leadership was given full credit for these victories, particularly in court paintings that depicted him as a brave warrior on horseback.¹² In short, efforts like these returned *wu* to roughly the same level as *wen*, which represented both a rebalancing of the two values that was in alignment with historical (pre-Song) norms.

That being said, Qianlong was careful not to overemphasize the *wu* aspects of his own character, so as to make sure the *wen*-trained bureaucrats who managed his empire would respect him. To accomplish this, he sponsored and collected fine art, financed the production of an astounding compilation of texts he called the *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (四库全书), and wrote his own poetry. In this, as Mark Elliott writes, “Qianlong also sought to embody the ideal of the educated man, who in his words and deeds perfectly balanced *wen* and *wu* ... To rule successfully, Qianlong needed to establish himself intellectually, to show himself

⁷ Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Emperor and Military Under the Qing Dynasty* (I.B. Tauris, 2006), 4.

⁸ Taken from Louie and Edwards, “Chinese Masculinity,” 145. Their discussion of Huang Kuanzhong, 南宋军政与文献探索 [An investigation into the military administration and texts of the Southern Song] (Xinwen Feng Chubanshe, 1980), is particularly illuminating. Original: 重文轻武.

⁹ Nicolas Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2016), 8.

¹⁰ See Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity*, 25, as well as Lary, *Warlord Soldiers*. Louie and Edwards, “Chinese Masculinity,” again referencing Huang Kuanzhong (1980), assert that this is a post-Song maxim. Original: 好鐵不打釘，好男不當兵.

¹¹ Mark Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (Pearson, 2009), 61-65.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86-106.

well versed in the poetry, art, history, and philosophy of the ages as the erudites over whom he presumed to govern.”¹³ In other words, the ethnic tensions of the Qing period created a need for greater military surveillance over the civilian population, as well as an effort to demonstrate cultural literacy and even superiority in terms of China’s traditions.

There are indications that the efforts of emperors like Qianlong to balance the two values were only partially successful, as the post-Song predilection towards the *wen* persisted during the Qing. After the conquest, the Qing, like other “alien rulers,” encouraged Han Chinese to remain in civil rather than military roles, thus further subscribing *wen* to the subdued population. At the same time, the court also grappled with how to select “men of talent,” especially given natural suspicions against the overly cultured but politically resistant elites from the Jiangnan region. While reinstating the military and civil service examination system from the Ming dynasty, the Qing made important innovations in educational institutions, especially for the sons of military bannermen and other elites. Nevertheless, the civil examinations, which were assessed based upon knowledge of the Confucian classics, were valued much more highly than military examinations.¹⁴

More importantly, the disastrous failures of the Qing military in the mid-nineteenth century against both foreign incursion and the Taiping rebels signified the necessity for a reconceptualization of military strategy on a grand scale that required input both from the classically educated and the martially competent. In the Self-Strengthening Movement (自强运动), the state attempted to halt this decline via the learning and application of Western military technology: a navy was built, arsenals were erected, and the army was retrained to use modern weapons. As demonstrated by China’s defeats in the Sino-French war of 1884-1885 and First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, these efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful.¹⁵ Although Elman and others now argue against the teleological reading of history that condemns the Qing for these military defeats as cultural failures, the political legacy of this history was a turn against traditional forms of *wen-wu* balance. Critics again bitterly decried China’s inability to defend itself, with officials like Li Hongzhang (1823-1901) fully accepting the military and even cultural superiority of Japan’s Meiji reforms.

Ironically, Japan’s victory was also inspirational, as the 1868 Meiji Restoration served as an example for how the Qing might successfully modernize its polity and society. In particular, a key factor behind Japan’s transformation was the priority given to *wu* by providing more evidence that a rebalancing was long overdue. Moreover, Meiji success suggested a new kind of *wen* that was predicated on science and technology, especially in the domains of international law and military technology. This new appreciation of the physical world beyond China and the intellectual world beyond the Chinese classics integrated *wen* and *wu* in a way that incorporated European sciences, technology, and legal studies in all applicable domains of governance and security. In other words, victory in 1895 demonstrated that Japan was not just

¹³ Ibid., 107.

¹⁴ Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 119-123.

¹⁵ Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T’ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 72.

a matter of martial valor and military capacity, but also a comprehensive reconfiguration of the domains of knowledge as well.

Consequently, the years after the war created what Douglas Reynolds has termed a “Golden Decade” of Sino-Japanese relations, when the Qing state actively sought to emulate the Japanese example in the form of the New Policies (新政) of 1901-1911. During this era, a variety of laws were passed, including ones initiating the transformation of the state into a constitutional monarchy, abolishing the traditional civil service examinations in favor of Western-style schools, allowing for provincial assemblies that local elites a platform for their voices to be heard. Other laws directly contributed to a much more thorough integration of *wen* and *wu* than before, creating a New Army (新军) comprised of professionally trained soldiers under the command of Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), while the sons of elite Chinese society were sent to Japan under state sponsorship to pursue a military education, often to return to their homeland as instructors and mentors to cadets in Chinese military academies.¹⁶

Compared to prior efforts by the Qing to rebalance *wen* and *wu*, the impact of military education in China as a specialized branch of scientific knowledge represented a new level of integration between the two norms as well as a new conceptualization of both norms that would have far-reaching consequences for China’s politics after the 1911 revolution. Those newly trained as professional soldiers self-confidently saw themselves as the future of their nation, with their freshly acquired knowledge as the much-needed remedy for bringing their people into modernity. Yet in no small part due to the negative connotations with which *wu* had been freighted for so long, they had difficulty convincing the civilian population of their superior ability to lead. They expected that their new knowledge and training would elevate them into the ranks of elite leadership, and that membership in elite circles would be sufficient to grant them legitimacy to govern. This is perhaps one reason that so-called warlords were so generous as philanthropists, especially for experimental social programs like literacy training.¹⁷ But because their military vocation had been long associated with brute force, uncouth behavior, illiteracy and inferiority, their reception was, at best, tepid and indifferent. They were also wrong about the durability of elite cultural leadership: just as the support of common soldiers began to determine their officers’ authority (and not the other way around), the inclusion of military strongmen among elite circles was soon followed by the eclipse of elite culture by mass party politics.

A Post-1911 Domination of *Wu*?

Following the 1911 Xinhai Revolution and fall of the Qing dynasty, China seemed to revert to historical patterns of *wu*-supremacy, in which the former empire was divided up among various cliques of “Warlords” who ruled their territories with limitless authority and

¹⁶ For more on the New Policies, with particular attention paid to their connection to the Japanese example, see Douglas Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993). For a significant re-evaluation of Yuan Shikai's innovations in the New Army, see Hong Zhang, “Yuan Shikai and the Significance of his Troop Training at Xiaozhan, Tianjin, 1895-1899,” *The Chinese Historical Review* 26, no. 1 (2019): 37-54; see also Patrick Fuliang Shan, *Yuan Shikai: A Reappraisal* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2018).

¹⁷ Xia Shi, *At Home in the World: Women and Charity in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 2018).

endlessly warred with each other for prestige and profit. With frequent betrayals and changing alliances, the rise and fall of each of these cliques is complex and often confusing to historians, and even more so to those who were forced to endure their tyranny.¹⁸ If Meiji Japan represented an ideal of political and military progress that integrated and reconceptualized *wen* and *wu* in order to form a more modern nation-state, led by the educated and moral, the newly formed Republic of China fell far short. Instead, it was dominated by men who were perceived to be completely lacking *wen*: uneducated, uncultured, and selfish.

It is unfair to characterize all of these men in this way: they hailed from many different types of backgrounds and are difficult to characterize with broad stereotypes. Some, like Zhang Zongchang (1881-1932) and Zhang Zuolin (1875-1928), were brutal, illiterate, and might be better characterized as bandits than military officers. In other words, they were modern-day embodiments of historical fears of *wu* without *wen*.¹⁹ Others, like Yan Xishan (1883-1960), benefitted from conventional Confucian childhood educations as well as Japanese military training.²⁰ Still other warlords defy classification into either group: for example, Feng Yuxiang (1882-1948), who worked his way up the military ranks to become a major army leader was perceived to be “shrewd, ruthless, and notoriously slippery,” while also “a Christian modernizer with feminist and... socialist tendencies.”²¹ In short, there were many kinds of warlords, all of whom exhibited varying degrees of *wen* and *wu*, in spite of stereotypes to the contrary.²²

While military generals seemed to fail due to their lack of *wen*, civilians, particularly at the national level, appeared incompetent because they lacked the courage and conviction associated with *wu*. These civil officials appeared to be meek, recessive, and compliant: failing to keep up with the modern trends, they epitomized the worst aspects of *wen* in the dynastic literati tradition. They supposedly thrived in conspiratorial schemes in dark corners, becoming colorless bureaucrats who advanced no one’s interest but their own and those of their cliques. What time they spent at work was wasted arguing over constitutions and policies that had little relevance to the life of the average Chinese, and factionalism paralyzed the state.²³

In sum, a republic had replaced an empire, but little else seemed to change; if anything, things grew even worse without a unifying ideology like Confucianism or central authority like

¹⁸ Good summaries can be found in David Bonavia, *China’s Warlords* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), Hsi-sheng Ch’i, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1976), and Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China’s Turning Point, 1924-1925* (Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For the clearest statement about warlords lacking *wen*, see Oderic Wou, *Militarism in Modern China: The Career of Wu P’ei-fu, 1916-1939* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978).

¹⁹ For more on Zhang Zongchang, see Bonavia, 171-182. For more on Zhang Zuolin, see Gavan McCormick, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911-1928: China, Japan, and the Manchurian Idea* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1977).

²⁰ For more on Yan, see Donald G. Gillin, *Warlord: Yen Hsi-shan in Shansi Province, 1911-1930* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1967).

²¹ Kate Merkel-Hess, “A New Woman and Her Warlord: Li Dequan, Feng Yuxiang, and the Politics of Intimacy in Twentieth-Century China,” in *Frontiers of History in China*, 11, no. 3 (2016), 431-457, 435-6; see also James Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-hsiang* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1966).

²² For more on how the “Warlord” label was pejoratively used, see Arthur Waldron, “The Warlord: Twentieth-Century Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and Imperialism,” in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 4, (Oct. 1991), 1073-1100.

²³ Andrew Nathan, *Peking Politics, 1918-1923: Factionalism and the Failure of Constitutionalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976).

the Qing Court. Furthermore, this new republic seemed even more unable to fend off the continued predations of foreign powers like Great Britain and Japan. One monograph detailing the factionalism that paralyzed the central government goes so far as to call this era “the darkest corner of twentieth-century Chinese history... the most disorderly period in the history of modern China.”²⁴

Standard narratives of the period focus on how the absence of *wen* contributed to a nation in chaos that was eventually saved by revolution and centralized party politics. This dissertation challenges this narrative by describing how *wen* not only persisted, but did so in a way that enabled local elites in Hunan to survive during a period of broader unrest. In parallel and partial challenge to more conventional narratives that privilege social revolution and radical cultural change as the only means by which China would recover *wen* and eventually thrive, this dissertation describes how local elites in Hunan relied upon *wen*, not only in the form of new technologies and domains of knowledge, but also in personal networks and older forms of cultural capital. These elites used these traditional forms of *wen* to advocate for gradual reform and to achieve a measure of stability in their spheres of influence. Traditional values persisted in the twentieth century, especially among lower-ranking co-provincial military men who were more versed in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* than in contemporary military theory. Wen-hsin Yeh has shown that these men, in fact, were “profoundly suspicious of the May Fourth rhetoric of cultural iconoclasm and social revolution brandished by the educated elite, which had embraced a Westernized, urban style of life.”²⁵ Many such men in the *juntong*, the KMT military intelligence agency prior to 1946, hailed from Hunan as well as Zhejiang and Guangdong. In touch with the mores of his men but primarily in response to the direction of Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), *juntong* general Dai Li (1897-1946) deliberately employed rhetoric concerning chivalry and heroism to appeal to the loyalty of his subordinates during a later period, in spite of the ideological transformations that had occurred in the intervening years.²⁶ This language, being drawn from popular fiction and historical romance, suggests how *wen* and *wu* remained significant norms around which individuals could orient their behavior, even after 1911. Yeh shows that this rhetoric could also serve as a constraining force of Dai Li’s efforts by binding him to traditional bonds of duty among his high-ranking subordinates in the field, even when he suspected them of disloyalty.²⁷ Given the endurance of these constraining values into the period of the second Sino-Japanese war, it was still so much more true before the advent of mass party politics. Likewise, this dissertation argues that traditional elite culture continued to bind statesmen of the post-1911 era to adhere to the mores within their networks, even when they might have suspected each other of disloyalty or treachery.

²⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁵ Wen-hsin Yeh, “Dai Li and the Liu Geqing affair: Heroism in the Chinese Secret Service During the War of Resistance,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Aug. 1989), 545-562. 550.

²⁶ Ibid., 545-562.

²⁷ This rhetoric is also employed by Tao in *Anecdotes*, with the various figures of the era filling in for the historical romances and classics of chivalry he evokes.

Re-assessing Reform, Revolution, and the “Warlord Decade”

By addressing the questions outlined above, regarding the transformation of *wen* and *wu* in transitions of power, this dissertation re-examines standard periodization. The 1916-1926 period in which these Hunanese elites enjoyed the most autonomy from central control merits its own designation as a decade of exploration and indeterminacy in Chinese political history. This period is usually termed the “Warlord Decade,” as it represents the period of time in which the central state was particularly weak, giving local militarists the freedom to carve out territory for themselves. The first five years after the 1911 revolution enjoyed a limited degree of political stability, but the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916 marked a turning point in the end of the old order. This end, however, did not necessarily set the nation upon any specific course of action, including revolutionary change or Leninist party politics. In contrast to the manner in which this history is typically told, these transitional years were not simple, straightforward, clear-cut and predetermined; this was a time of contingency and indeterminacy in which multiple possibilities for China’s future coexisted.

In keeping with this challenge to the standard teleological history of the period, this dissertation highlights the often-overlooked potential of gradual reform instead of radical revolution. The founding of the CCP in 1921 and Leninist reorganization of the KMT in 1923 signaled a turn towards the latter framework for advancing lasting change, but this was not, to borrow from the title of Chiang Kai-shek’s later articulation of these ideas, “China’s Destiny.”²⁸ As Hans van de Ven has noted, both parties asserted the necessity for a violent revolutionary break with the past that both embraced militarization and absorbed its lessons while also distancing themselves from a mythos of militarism in the so-called warlord period.²⁹ The revolutionary discourse of those parties eventually overwhelmed those of reform, making it difficult for the reformist agenda, despite its aspirations for disruptive change, to be appropriately appreciated. The revolutionary agenda valorized the necessity of violence. Only in hindsight can historians come to recognize and appreciate the contained tension within a reformist agenda of managed transition. In this dissertation, reformist agendas are primarily seen through experiments with federalism and constitutionalism, which declined in favor as a result, of Yuan Shikai’s assassination of popular KMT politician Song Jiaoren (1882-1913). Notwithstanding these political failures, Tan Yankai’s public discourse on federalism deserves to be taken seriously as a reformist effort.

By showing the importance of reform, this dissertation uncovers a heretofore understudied version of history. In Hunan, perhaps like other provinces, factors like personalized politics, personalities, memories of family and lineage ties, individual styles, accrued prestige, past favors and grievances, all carried greater weight than the generalizing and abstract appeal of political ideologies that print, centering in Shanghai, would propagate in the subsequent decades to the masses. Nicole Barnes reminds us that much of the historiography of twentieth-century China is focused on a nationalism that was centered on print culture, even when personal bonds were forged and reinforced, especially among non-

²⁸ Chiang Kai-shek, *China’s Destiny & Chinese Economic Theory, With Notes and Commentary by Phillip Jaffe* (Roy Publishers, 1947).

²⁹ Hans van de Ven, “The Military in the Republic,” *China Quarterly*, Vol. 150, (June 1997): 352-374.

elites in the countryside, by physical contact.³⁰ By shifting from major national-level centers of culture and politics like Beijing and Shanghai to the local conditions in inland provinces like Hunan, and by critically examining the assumptions made by our present revolutionary interpretation of this period, this dissertation disentangles elite and non-elite military culture, as well as the different kinds of events that lead to transitions in power.

The 1920 Mutiny

Given the above, this dissertation's focus on the November 1920 mutiny that forced Hunan governor Tan Yankai from power might seem curious, as this event ostensibly epitomizes the standard paradigm of the "Warlord Decade"—specifically, how the cultural elite embodied by then-governor Tan made way for martial rule embodied by then-general and future governor Zhao Hengti. According to this narrative, one would expect Tan and Zhao to be bitter enemies, and for Zhao to be a martial ruler with little to no sense of decorum, civility, or culture as he betrayed his former superior.

Tan Yankai was mere months into his third term as Hunan governor at the time of the mutiny, and his background as a former scholar-official of the Qing regime make him a prime candidate to be displaced by the violent currents of the time. Born as a member of the gentry and the son of a nationally prominent Qing bureaucrat, he was one of the last to pass the highest levels of the imperial civil service examination before they were abolished. Though trained from a young age to be a supporter of the Qing, he joined the resistance to imperial rule and became a leader of the newly formed provincial assembly. When the Qing collapsed in 1911, he became governor of the province for the first time, before being removed from power as a result of his opposition to Yuan Shikai's ambitions to resurrect the dynastic system. Tan returned to his former position in 1916 but was again deposed in 1918. His third term lasted from July to November of 1920.

Just as Tan appears to exemplify the easily displaced cultural elite, Zhao Hengti, his replacement, appears to exemplify the martial class which would supposedly commandeer power. Though born the same year as Tan and also a member of Hunan's gentry class, Zhao's prestige was far more locally based. In contrast to Tan's success in the national civil service examinations and in local Hunanese politics, Zhao studied in Japan, where he specialized in artillery and graduated in 1908 from the Japanese Officer's Academy. Appointed to command the New Army cadets in Guangxi at the time of the 1911 revolution, he was reassigned to Hunan in 1912 in order to help Tan with his disbandment program, where he rose to command regiments, divisions, and the army itself. Over the next eight years, Zhao and Tan remained close allies who followed a similar path: both removed from power for their opposition to Yuan Shikai in 1913, returning to power in Hunan in 1916, removed again in 1918, and returning a third time in July 1920.

In November 1920, a mutiny in the province's northeast precipitated Tan's exile and Zhao's elevation. As before, Tan's third rise to the apex of political and military power had been supported by disparate factions that had allied with each other against the previous regime. Victory and peace were accompanied by demands for a more equitable sharing of power

³⁰ Nicole Elizabeth Barnes, *Intimate Communities: Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937–1945*. (California: University of California Press, 2018).

among these groups. Though Tan had been able to manage these demands in the past, his inability to do so this time led to a mutiny that broke out on the 13th of the month; by the 27th, he was forced onto a boat bound for exile in Shanghai.

According to various firsthand accounts, Zhao was the prime conspirator behind Tan's downfall: an interpretation of events that corresponds with the national narrative of soldiers seizing power from civilians during this period of time. The precedent had been set on the national level earlier by Yuan Shikai, whose assassination of KMT leader Song Jiaoren and later attempt to reestablish the dynastic system with himself at its head strangled the nascent democracy of the new Republic in its cradle. The KMT would later be betrayed again by its erstwhile military allies in 1922, when the military leader Chen Jiongming (1878-1933) infamously attacked Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) in Guangdong. Thus, when Mao Zedong (1893-1976), describing the events of November 1920, claimed that "T'an Yen-kai [Tan Yankai] was driven out of Hunan by a militarist called Chao Heng-t'i, [Zhao Hengti] who utilized the 'Hunan independence' movement for his own ends. He pretended to support it, advocating the idea of a United Autonomous States of China, but as soon as he got power he suppressed the democratic movement with great energy,"³¹ these events seem to be yet another example of this pattern.

However, narratives of Zhao's treachery are oversimplifications of a more complex reality. Unsurprisingly, Zhao's memoirs concerning this affair assert that he has no responsibility for the mutiny, and did not want Tan to leave Hunan. Moreover, he declares that he succeeded to the position with great reluctance, and only after much pleading on the part of Tan. While his protestations of innocence might seem to be precisely what a conspirator might claim, letters sent from Zhao to Tan in 1921 suggest the persistence of a cordial relationship between the two. Tan's diary entries from November of 1920, wherein he and Zhao are depicted as having multiple conversations, further support Zhao's claims. Integrating these materials into the extant literature on this event suggests how those who argue for the betrayal narrative, like Mao are deliberately interpreting these events in a way that advances their own political purposes.³²

Reexamining this transition of power from Tan to Zhao in 1920, this dissertation argues that Zhao's apparent betrayal has been overemphasized in order to fit these events within a broader argument concerning the disorder and violence of the "Warlord Era" that necessitated radical change, fully ridding China of its feudal past and fulfilling the expectations set in 1911. The trends and currents at the national level all seemed to have parallels in Hunan: reformist experiments with provincial autonomy, federalism, and constitutionalism mirror the bureaucratic bickering in the rival national capitals in Beijing and Guangzhou. Zhao's ostensible betrayal seems simultaneously like one more example of factional politics as well as the increasing militarization that was inundating China. The Hunan peasant uprising led by Mao in 1927 that represents intractable fissures within rural society was a precursor to his eventual

³¹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*, (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 138.

³² For an example of this, see Mao's critique of how Zhao Hengti manipulated the Hunan Provincial Constitution to serve his own ends, "Hunan Under the Provincial Constitution," (July 1, 1923) in Stuart Schram, *Mao's Road to Power, Vol. 2: National Revolution and Social Revolution, December 1920-June 1927*. (Armonk, NY.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994) 166-167.

triumph in 1949 at the national level. Hunan's history during this period seems to be a microcosm for broader issues beyond its borders.

However, a closer examination of this self-fulfilling mythos yields significant differences as well. Analyzing the mutiny yields a picture of local politics that differs significantly from the mainstream narrative. At the very least, Tan and Zhao were not cartoonishly self-interested buffoons, and their relationship was not suffused with failure and treachery. Recovering their limited successes as allies and administrators suggests the degree to which our understanding of these events has been grossly oversimplified.

In choosing to reconstruct the mutiny, its causes, and its interpretations, this dissertation reinterprets an ostensible nadir of local politics to subvert the dominant history of the province and thus the nation. The primary focus is on the lives and careers of Tan and Zhao, the two key figures in this mutiny, as former Qing elites who became local reformers during this era of Chinese history. The lives of fellow Hunanese Li Jiannong and Tao Juyin are also introduced, as their narratives of this era have shaped how it is remembered still.

Born in the same year as Tan and Zhao, Li Jiannong's studies in Japan and Great Britain fueled his fervent advocacy for federalism and constitutional reform. He first published his own periodical in Shanghai that outlined the ways in which federalism could save China before becoming the chair of the committee charged with designing a provincial constitution for his home province as well as a senior bureaucrat. Following his retirement from local politics, he became a professor; his lectures on modern Chinese history were collected into a textbook that divides those advocating for change in the late Qing and Republican eras between reformers and revolutionaries. His sympathy for the latter over the former both represents and shapes how the era is classified to this day.

In contrast to Li's more scholarly perspective, Tao Juyin's writings were designed to appeal to a wider audience; an approach informed by his occupation as journalist for a number of Shanghai-based dailies during this period. Two decades later, he drew on his experience in this role to write an influential eight volume "historical romance" on the warlord era. Filled with lurid detail and evoking the spirit of other fictionalized martial histories like *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Tao's epic emphasizes the intrigue and brutality of the era, implicitly suggesting how the violent social revolution of the CCP saved China from itself. Together, Li and Tao's portrayals of the warlord period have dominated our understanding of these years.

The Limits of Revolutionary History?

How can historians move beyond the narratives established by Li and Tao, given their continued influence? What might a non-revolutionary history of Hunan or China look like? Answering these questions entails critically reflecting upon our current paradigm, deconstructing its implicit teleological assumptions concerning the necessity of radical change, and uncovering the unfulfilled possibilities for what could have been. At the time of their writing, Li and Tao were sympathetic towards the KMT and the CCP, respectively. Though the two Leninist parties are typically seen as diametrically opposed, they share an ostensible distaste for the past, and stress the need for radical transformation at the expense of managed and gradual change. The narratives constructed by Li and Tao follow in this vein and therefore local history of the 1920 mutiny is made to fit the larger national narrative of "warlord" betrayal and the necessity and inevitability of revolution. The contrast between the more private

writings of elites Zhao and Tan with the Li and Tao narratives that are created to appeal to a wider audience is worth noting.

Moreover, though Li and Tao are natives of Hunan, they, like most others, write from the perspective of the more westernized and modernized coast. Inland provinces like Hunan were often measured against the cultural and economic flourishing of the Yangtze and Pearl River Delta areas and found wanting. Popular fiction like Ba Jin's *Family* would categorize these areas as hopelessly backward and underdeveloped, contributing to perceptions of a vast chasm between places like modern Shanghai and the rest of the nation.³³

Consequently, when Tan and Zhao initiated the development of Hunan provincial constitution and became leaders in the short-lived federalist movement that advocated for the provinces and the central government to share political power, their efforts were viewed with intense skepticism. In histories like those written by Li and Tao, these projects are little more than excuses for warlords to selfishly further their own prosperity at the expense of the nation. Indeed, the belief that federalism is perceived to be a key contributor to an increasingly divided nation is deeply ironic for Li Jiannong in particular, given his past advocacy for this form of national organization as a way of managing China's size and diversity. His description of the eventual failure of federalism in *Political History* neglects its appeal, however short-lived.

Hunan thus provides a window for an alternative history of the transitional decade between the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916 and the Northern Expedition in 1926. With Hunan at the center, this period can be seen as one of reform and militarization (defined as "the spread of organizational techniques, routines and attitudes characteristic of the military to other realms") rather than solely revolution and militarism (defined as "the domination of the political by the military"—or, in our terms, the takeover of *wen* by the *wu*).³⁴ This decade saw militarization of institutional changes first begun by late Qing, predicated on Confucian norms, giving way to militarism of the Nationalist Party with its ideological underpinning in the disciplining of the entire population. Hunan in particular demonstrated the possibilities of a form of militarization that worked in partnership with provincial self-governance with constitutional aspirations. In other words, the *wu* did not overwhelm the *wen*. Indeed, the civility between Tan and Zhao represents the elite facilitation of this possibility. Challenging the mythos of warlord misrule and the teleology of revolutionary change reveals previously understudied possibilities of how Hunan—and perhaps even China—could have been under different circumstances.

Dissertation Chapter Outlines

The first chapter introduces the young lives of Tan, Zhao, Li, and Tao in the context of Hunan's reforms during the late Qing, leading up to the 1911 Revolution. The topography and local history of Hunan in the 19th century—particularly in regard to the success of the scholar-general Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) in the Taiping Civil War as well as the martyrdom of Tan Sitong (1895-1898) in the short-lived 1898 national reforms—were influential in shaping their worldview. This is most clearly demonstrated by the answers given by Tan Yankai in the 1905

³³ Kristin Stapleton, *Fact in Fiction: 1920s China and Ba Jin's Family*, (Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 2016), is quite astute on this point.

³⁴ van de Ven, "The Military in the Republic," 353.

civil service exams, in which his ambiguity concerning the importance of central state control over local governments was rewarded with one of the highest scores possible.

The second chapter stays with the four in the years following 1911, now young men rising to positions of prominence, but shifts the focus to the dichotomies of reform and revolution. During this period of time, the failed efforts to promulgate a national constitution and the attempt by Yuan Shikai to reestablish the dynastic system with himself at the head were seminal events that informed how each of these four would view power and authority. It was also during this period that Tan became provincial governor for the first time, following the assassination of his predecessor, presaging the betrayal narrative of 1920 while simultaneously inverting it by having a bureaucrat replace a soldier. Li's *Political History*, which stresses the necessity of revolution and inadequacies of reform, is the text used to summarize these events; this chapter juxtaposes its narrative with several documents that describe the gradual reform of Hunan's postal system to suggest the policies that Li overlooks.

The third chapter describes the political vacuum that was formed after Yuan Shikai's 1916 death, as a way of giving further background for the 1920 Mutiny. Tao's *Anecdotes* is used as the primary lens through which these events are recounted, as a way of highlighting how his sensationalistic style has shaped our understanding of the period. This dissertation argues that the sources used for narrating the history of the "Warlord Era" are crucial to how it is conceptualized, as demonstrated by juxtaposing the conventional narrative of chaos as epitomized by Tao with a 1917 petition from the Hunan Provincial Assembly to the central government that represents the persistence of bureaucratic communications during this tumultuous time. This chapter also examines two of Li's essays on federalism as a way of describing the influence of the movement.

The fourth chapter closely examines common depictions of the 1920 mutiny and subsequent exile of Tan Yankai that emphasize the culpability of Zhao Hengti in order to show how the event has been narrated to fit the paradigm established by Li and Tao. Here, the various textbooks and oral histories on this event are compared; in this narrative, Tan appears to be the hapless victim who is betrayed by the militarist Zhao, thus fulfilling the common stereotypes of warlord perfidy. The fifth chapter challenges the perspectives set forth in the fourth chapter in both interpretation as well as sources, integrating the conventional wisdom with evidence from Tan's diary and Zhao's letters that have only been made available within the past twenty years, far after the publication of *Political History* and *Anecdotes*. Here, the chapter articulates a revisionist history of the mutiny that suggests how the broader historiography can be changed. The dissertation concludes with an epilogue detailing the lives of these four men after 1920.

Through the prism of provincial politics and the 1920 mutiny, we can see how failed experiments with federalism were retroactively eclipsed by Leninist-style, mass-party politics on a national scale. By carefully comparing and adjudicating different sources, especially in their shaping of narratives and historiography, this dissertation also tries to acknowledge the gap between mythos and possibility and to capture those years prior to the advent of mass party politics, when elite reformers, using Confucian norms and practices, directed Hunanese politics, with provincial self-governance and provincial constitution as unique contributions. In contrast to conventional narratives of revolutionary transformation, this dissertation argues that

substantive and reformist political change was occurring after 1911, even if some of the its rhetoric and norms were built upon traditional institutions and forms of communication.

Chapter 1: Education, Application, and the History of Hunan

Introduction

This chapter briefly outlines the nineteenth-century history of Hunan as well as the lives of four of the province's young elite. Its purpose in doing so is to demonstrate the importance of this region to the rest of China, to discuss the reasons why so many of modern China's political and intellectual leaders come from this area, and to describe some of the options available to this generation of ambitious young men. Han Chinese born in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, like these four, represented a transitional cohort that was caught between the traditional political order of the past and the uncertain future. In many ways, the material, geostrategic, intellectual, and political conditions in Hunan afforded them the appropriate balance of flexibility and confidence to take advantage of the opportunities that the coming era would present. Hunan's material conditions as well as its intellectual legacy imbued Tan and Zhao with the confidence and ambition to take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the chaos of the early Republic. However, building their authority upon this legacy would eventually limit their broader appeal and prospects for advancement as the mass politics of the new era began to gain traction.

Hunan as a “Between” Place

In the late Qing, Hunan was a space to respond to the military affront of the Taipings and the uneasy appearance of foreigners. In this cross-section of martial innovation, extra-bureaucratic restructurings, and new schools, Hunan's elites and especially its youth developed new strategies for advancement and new conceptions of *wen* and *wu* that both challenged and resonated with those of prior generations of Chinese elites. Its history as an internal frontier and as the home to the saviors of the Qing produced the appropriate conditions for experimentation with new ways of thinking that would not alienate the broader nation. Hunan's armies had defended the empire and defeated prior attempts to subvert Confucian traditions during the mid-nineteenth century; in the process, the defenders of tradition led a conservative reformist agenda called the Statecraft School (經世派). Ironically, by the late nineteenth century, inheritors of that legacy would present themselves as working within that tradition to modernize and even overthrow that same empire.¹

Physically, Hunan—so named because of its position south (nan) of large lake (hu) Dongting—can be categorized as a “between” place in multiple ways. Spatially, it is between several provinces: Hubei to its north, Sichuan and Guizhou to its west, Guangxi and Guangdong to its south, and Jiangxi to its east. As a result, unlike provinces like Yunnan or Guangxi that

¹ For more on these texts and the statecraft school, see Benjamin A. Elman, “The Relevance of Sung Learning in the Late Ch'ing: Wei Yuan and the Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien,” *Late Imperial China* Vol. 9 No. 2 (Dec. 1988), 56-85; Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Daniel McMahon, *Rethinking the Decline of China's Qing Dynasty: Imperial Activism and Borderland Management at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*. (Routledge, 2015); William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Frederic Wakeman Jr., “The Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien,” *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* 1.10 (1969), 8-22

border a foreign state, or maritime provinces like Fujian or Guangdong, Hunan is not a borderland area, and therefore not a natural recipient of the influence of any non-Chinese culture or tradition. Geopolitically, Hunan is also a strategic military space.

Hunan's waterways constitute a second factor that contributes to its integration with the rest of China. The aforementioned Dongting Lake was a major center of commerce that joined with the Yangzi river, making connections to the tri-cities of Hankow-Hanyang-Wuchang in Hubei province (now better known as Wuhan) as well as the more physically distant Jiangnan region easy as well as economical. By the late nineteenth century, Hunan had become integrated with the national market, taking advantage of "climactic conditions that were very favorable to high-yielding, intensive agriculture"² to become a net exporter of rice, tea, and other agricultural products.³ With the opening of Hankow to foreign trade in the middle of the nineteenth century the orientation of the province's export shifted away from the south towards the north.⁴

Yet Hunan was also a "between" place in its geographical features, being dominated by waterways as well as mountains. While the four major rivers—Xiang, Yuan, Zi, and Li—that fed into Dongting Lake in the north created valleys with fertile soil that enabled intensive agricultural production and dense settlement, the province was bordered on the west, south, and east by mountain ranges that created a clear separation from neighboring provinces. G. William Skinner classifies Hunan as one of the constituent polities of the "Middle Yangtse" macro-region along with its northern neighbor Hubei, as these drainage basins and mountain ranges closely linked the two provinces with regards to commerce and trade.⁵ The two were only separated into separate political entities under the Qing dynasty; even then, many administrative functions were based in Wuhan, under the office of the Huguang Zongdu, or Viceroy (總督). Wuhan's greater size and economic dominance over the macro-region made it the more logical location for this office, but the effect of this political choice was to reduce Hunan in relative political importance, effectively rendering the province distant from the rest of the empire during the majority of the dynasty. This topography had the effect of turning Hunan economically inward, with the majority of its economic activity and attention focused on itself and its neighbor, in line with Skinner's findings concerning the importance of physical features in determining commercial interchange. In other words, using Skinner's vocabulary, the bureaucratic and administrative boundaries of the province that had been imposed by the central state corresponded with the topographic boundaries set by the mountains, contributing to a strong provincial identity. In other words, Hunan's this terrain made frequent inter-

² Peter Perdue, *Exhausting the Earth: State and Peasant in Hunan, 1500-1800 AD* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 27.

³ See also Evelyn Rawski, "Regional Diversity in the Development of Hunan" in Evelyn Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1972) for more on Qing-era Hunan.

⁴ William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1984) 58, 88.

⁵ For one example of his articulation of these ideas, see G. William Skinner, "Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century China," in G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China*. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1969), 211-252.

provincial movement difficult, yet not insurmountable enough to prevent flourishing trade, creating connection as well as division between its different regions.⁶

The combination of these features caused Hunan to be a “between” place with regards to any division between north and south China. In the first decade and a half after the 1911 Revolution, when various factions of militarists contended with each other for hegemony over the remnants of the fallen empire, geography proved to be one of the fault lines along which alliances were formed. In order to move goods or troops between north and south, travel across Hunan was all but inevitable. Angus McDonald Jr. concisely describes these circumstances and how they affected Hunan:

During the Period of Confusion (1913-1928), the province was a springboard for Southern warlords interested in moving against the North, for the Wuhan cities were nearly on its border and with them lay control of the commerce of the middle Yangtze basin. Hunan was not a good springboard for an attack upon the South: there are many natural barriers across the border, including the easily defended Nanling Mountains in southern Hunan itself; but a Hunan in the hands of the South posed a real strategic threat to the north.⁷

In short, Hunan’s central location made it a crossroads and therefore a key target for conquest by any faction that aspired to control the nation. Historically, this had also been the case: Philip Kuhn makes the point that the Taiping Army enjoyed their most success after 1852, once they had progressed “out of rivers draining toward the south coast and into rivers draining towards the Yangtze.”⁸ In other words, control over Hunan and its surroundings provided the resources that fueled the subsequent Taiping victories in the wealthy Lower Yangtze area. Lyman Van Slyke concurs, noting that “in so many instances in Chinese history, control of the middle Yangtze was the key to the lower river,” making Hunan an essential stepping stone for any military force wishing to control the river and the nation.⁹ These geopolitical circumstances meant that violence was practically endemic to the area during the early Republic, with Hunanese and non-Hunanese armies alike being continually stationed in any area that offered economic and military benefits.

The mountainous regions of the province, particularly in West Hunan, also represented another type of between-state for Hunan: both civilized and barbarian. People groups like the Miao, Tujia, and Yao living in these areas were culturally distinct from the majority Han that populated the river valleys. These ethnic minorities were perceived to be “raw” or “barbaric” in nature, ostensibly needing the civilization that the empire would bring. What was more important, perhaps, was the valuable land upon which they resided; the desire to “tame” and

⁶ For more on the peculiarities of this internal frontier, see also Jerome Ch’en, *The Highlanders of Central China: A History, 1895-1937* (Armonk, NY.: M.E. Sharpe, 1992).

⁷ Angus W. McDonald, *The Urban Origins of Rural Revolution: Elites and the Masses in Hunan Province, China, 1911-1927* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 7.

⁸ Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies*, 114.

⁹ Lyman Van Slyke, *Yangtze: Nature, History, and the River*, (Addison-Wesley, 1988), 150.

“enlighten” these peoples strongly paralleled the impulse of Han immigrants and the imperial state to clear and settle their land.¹⁰

After the destruction of the Taiping Rebellion, estimates of Hunan’s population at the turn of the century vary. One 1885 census of the Qing empire estimated this figure to be 21 million, with the 1910 figure falling somewhat to 20.5 million.¹¹ Historian Chang P’eng-yuan suggests this figure omits data from 14 of the province’s 75 prefectures, and approximates the 1911 population at about 24 million.¹² Luo Huanzhen argues that these figures require further revision still, citing a 1912 survey that put the population of Hunan at 27.6 million.¹³ These numbers are confused further by Hunanese leaders during the 1911 Revolution proclaiming themselves to be representing their 30 million fellow provincials.¹⁴ As Tong Lam demonstrates, the desire for census information sometimes led to inflated estimates of China’s population.¹⁵ Stepping away from a definitive conclusion about the exact figure, there is perhaps enough evidence to surmise that the population was both sizeable and growing.

This large increase in population size strongly suggests the continued prosperity of Hunan during in the post-Taiping era. The reliability of tax records or provincial budgets make concrete estimations of provincial affluence speculative, at best. Chang P’eng-yuan argues that Hunan’s tax revenues in 1900 were roughly three million taels; a figure that doubled by 1911 and was roughly in balance with expenditures by that point.¹⁶ His figures are worth noting in the context of later claims by provincial leaders that Hunan’s treasury was empty, and lacked funds to pay for military and education expenses.

Hunan possessed, and continues to possess, a climate and topography favorable for highly productive agriculture, a spatial location between thriving ports like Hankow and Guangzhou, and the navigable waterways to make interchange possible among all of these regions. Travelers during the late Qing in particular expressed shock at the high volume of trade along Dongting Lake. Rice could be harvested as many as three times in a year, and its annual export during the late Qing exceeded 67,000 tons annually. Tea, minerals, timber, bamboo, coal, and many other natural resources were exported by the province, contributing to the tax revenues of the provincial government as well as the wealth of the elites who controlled these businesses. These material conditions persist across political regimes, so it is not unreasonable

¹⁰ For more on Qing attempts to pacify, but not conquer, this ‘barbarian’ minority region, see Donald Sutton, “Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier in the Eighteenth Century,” in Pamela Crossley, Helen Siu, and Donald Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Ethnicity and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006), 190-228; Donald Sutton, “Ethnic Revolt in the Qing Empire: ‘The ‘Miao Uprising’ of 1795-1797 Reexamined,” in *Asia Minor*, 3rd Series, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2003), 105-152; Daniel McMahon, *Rethinking the Decline*. For a discussion of this area during the Ming, see Yonglin Jiang, “The ‘Southern Great Wall of China’ in Fenghuang County: Discovery and Restoration,” in *Ming Studies*, 68 (2013), 57-82.

¹¹ W.W. Rockhill, “The 1910 Census of China,” in *T’uong Pao*, 2nd Series, Vol. 13., no. 1. (1912), 117-125.

¹² Chang P’eng-yuan [Zhang Pengyuan] 張朋園, *中國現代化的研究：湖南省，1860-1916* [Research on the Modernization of Different Regions of China: Hunan Province, 1860-1916]. (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1983), 13.

¹³ Luo Huanzhen, “民国人口：研究史の整理と展望” [The Population of the Republic: A Summary and Observation on Historical Research] Hitotsubashi University Discussion Paper No. D97-9, August 1997.

¹⁴ McDonald, *Rural Revolution*, 7.

¹⁵ Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation State, 1900-1949* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Chang P’eng-yuan [Zhang Pengyuan], *Hunan Province*, 232.

to speculate that the province during the late Qing and early republican periods was relatively affluent, though certainly in an uneven and unequal fashion.¹⁷

One final point remains concerning Hunan's material conditions: its large area of about 84,000 square miles, its topography of mountains and rivers, and its relatively rural population created a space that was diffuse and separated. The various dialects of Chinese that are spoken in Hunan today are often mutually unintelligible; this level of linguistic diversity in the present era, even after considerable effort to push the National Language (Guoyu) Movement in the 1920s and thereafter, strongly suggests an even greater degree during the late Qing.¹⁸ Thus, while Hunan had a strong provincial spirit that linked its people together beyond its borders in places like Beijing or Tokyo, there existed such intra-provincial diversity that real rivalries might persist between different regions and prefectures. West Hunan, as noted above, is one example, but the stark differences between the broad plains of the east and the mountainous south created a division there as well. In other words, though Hunan might have appeared unified and cohesive to outsiders, the province was actually linguistically and ethnically diverse and somewhat fractured.

The combination of all these material factors creates a province that required competent political leadership and innovative policy solutions for solving new problems of administration and control. The Hunanese elites of the late nineteenth century were inheritors of a provincial tradition of cultural and economic integration within the larger Qing empire as well as a history of needing the military administration befitting a frontier area. By the start of the nineteenth century, much of the formerly empty lands had been filled with Han migrants, and friction with the native "minority" tribes was widespread. In the empire as a whole, the limited state capacity of the Qing was colliding with the skyrocketing population growth that had accompanied the peace and prosperity of the eighteenth century. In Hunan, these issues were even more acute, necessitating competent management of public infrastructure, like the dikes that had been constructed around Dongting lake.¹⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century, capable local administration was also needed to control another phenomenon with which the rest of the nation was grappling: foreign influence. Hunan's economic prosperity and strategic importance had made it an object of envy, yet it retained a reputation for being fervently anti-foreign and its leaders had successfully postponed the establishment of the treaty-ports that had been established along China's east coast decades prior, and had begun to make their way along major waterways towards the interior. However, in no small part because "Hunan had been one of the major targets of the Japanese in their negotiating of the Treaty of Shimonoseki after the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War, and of the Sino-Japanese Trade Treaty signed in 1896,"²⁰ four treaty ports were established in

¹⁷ Charlton M. Lewis, *Prologue to the Chinese Revolution: The Transformation of Ideas and Institutions in Hunan Province, 1891-1907* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 6-8.

¹⁸ For a survey of the various Hunanese (Xiang) dialects, see Bao, Houxing 鲍厚星 and Chen Hui 陈晖, "湘語的分區" [The Classification of Xiang Group] in *Fangyan* 方言, No. 3 (August 2005): 261-270. For more information on the National Language Movement, see Yurou Zhong, "Script Crisis and Literary Modernity in China, 1916-1958" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2014).

¹⁹ See James Lee, "The Legacy of Immigration in Southwest China, 1250-1850," in *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1982), 279-304.

²⁰ McDonald, *Urban Origins*, 64.

Hunan in just eight years: Yuezhou in 1899, Changsha in 1904, Changde and Xiangtan both in 1906. With these new forms of semi-colonial administration came the attendant merchants and missionaries, as well as their new ideas.

Hunan's long tradition of intellectual scholarship thus clashed directly with these influences from abroad, causing the province to be caught "between" in yet another way. This conservative tradition is epitomized by the Yuelu Academy in the mountains of Changsha. Founded in the early Song dynasty, Yuelu Academy had hosted famed scholars Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and Zhang Shi (1133-1180), and was almost certainly the best-known institute of higher learning in the province. A number of important early nineteenth-century scholar-officials were associated with this school, including Wei Yuan (1794-1857) and He Changling (1785-1848), the editors of the "Collected Essays about Qing Statecraft" (皇朝經世文編]. Wei and He, along with their academic anthology, represent a statecraft tradition that is directly linked to Hunanese concerns with political administration and frontier management.²¹

In short, the material and geographical conditions in late nineteenth-century Hunan imbued its people with a combination of confidence in their own ability to lead and ambition to bring those talents to the national level. To repurpose Skinnerian language, it was a province on the economic periphery of the nation when compared with more core areas like the Lower Yangtze or Pearl River Deltas, or even its neighbor Hubei to the north. Yet it retained aspirations to political leadership, assisted by the widely-held belief that control over its Middle Yangtze macro-region was essential for broader control. In a sense, Hunan during the late Qing had a sense of its own cultural and political importance that were in tension with its comparatively lower economic importance.²²

The Legacy of Zeng Guofan

That being said, Hunanese were not well-represented in the Qing state until after the triumph of Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) and his Hunan Army over the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in their long and bloody war of 1850-1864, which simultaneously reinvigorated interest in the conservative Confucian tradition and created a relatively new trend of Hunanese rising to extremely senior positions of political power. Zeng was a *jinshi*, or metropolitan scholar, and a member of the Hanlin academy: the two most impressive academic qualifications that a civil official could have, thus demonstrating his grasp of *wen*.

Zeng's national-level prestige, coupled with truly dire circumstances, allowed him to experiment with new system of *wu*.²³ Although China had long prohibited officials from serving in their home towns, according to the Law of Avoidance, Zeng happened to be mourning the loss of his mother at precisely the time that the Taiping Army was encroaching upon Hunan. Because the Green Standard (Han army, 綠營兵) had declined, Zeng created an auxiliary

²¹ For more on Wei Yuan, see Philip A. Kuhn, "Participation and Authority in the Thought of Wei Yuan," in Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 27-53; Jane Kate Leonard, *Wei Yuan and China's Rediscovery of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²² The tension articulated here can be compared to that identified for Zhejiang in Wen-hsin Yeh, *Provincial Passages: Culture, Space, and the Origins of Chinese Communism*, (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1996), 262-3n3.

²³ Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War*. (New York, NY.: Knopf, 2012).

military corps called the Hunan (Xiang) Army (湘軍), which was built on the basis of gentry-led militia units. In other words, Zeng used personal knowledge and cultural capital to recruit soldiers locally, and units were comprised of family members (for example, uncles and nephews in the same unit). Zeng also led his protégé Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901) in the formation of the Anhui (Huai) Army (淮軍). Because the militia followed kinship networks, there was a possibility of internal loyalty rather than the top-down mobilization characteristic of the Qing banner system. The militia were also financed locally through an additional “likin tax” (written alternatively as 厘金 or 禮金), as a conversation surcharge that was unevenly levied, and not controlled by the court. Most importantly, Zeng created a “tent government” (幕府) of extralegal employees to help him buy Western weapons. Famously, Zeng recruited Yung Wing (1828-1912), among the first boys sent to study abroad in the United States and who had graduated from Yale University, to purchase modern weaponry abroad. Because these efforts shifted control from the central court to the province (in terms of local militia, local taxes, and para-governmental bureaucracy), the Self-Strengthening Movement is often considered a turn toward “devolution” of power from the center, or “decentralization.” This shift led Philip Kuhn to conclude that the Self-Strengthening Movement perhaps preserved the Qing dynasty, but actually led to “civilizational decline” of Confucian China as a whole.²⁴ This perspective essentializes Confucian China as somehow centered or defined by the court, and ignores other ways that dynamic traditions could legitimately continue in the provinces.

Zeng Guofan certainly saw himself as a defender of Chinese traditions rather than as someone who would initiate processes to undermine them. As the chief architect of the Qing victory over Taiping forces, Zeng was also an exemplar of *wu* values as well: neither feeble civil official, nor witless soldier, but instead the ideal embodiment of how *wen* and *wu* could be integrated in a traditional form.²⁵ Building upon the statecraft tradition of Wei and He, Zeng integrated Confucian principles into the training and organization of his army, and his victory was seen as an ideological defeat of the Taiping rebels’ alien pseudo-Christianity. With the extant political and social order preserved, Zeng and his subordinates were promoted to positions all over the empire.²⁶

Zeng’s success cemented the intellectual trajectory of elites all over the empire. The Self-Strengthening Movement was inspired by Zeng: his Taiping enemies represented a new and dangerous ideology that might have toppled the Qing and taken China in a completely different direction; Zeng’s victory was not only the triumph of one armed force over another, but also of the conservative tradition over a possible alternative form of Chinese culture, state, and society.²⁷ Furthermore, Zeng and his lieutenants were “offered bureaucratic appointments and promotions on the basis of military service, rather than on the traditional academic system

²⁴ Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies*.

²⁵ For more on this version of *wu*-values expressed as “Muscular Confucianism,” see Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964).

²⁶ For more on Zeng and his legacy, see his entry in Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period, 1644-1912* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., [1943-4] 2002), 751-56

²⁷ Jonathan D. Spence, *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W.W. Norton; London: Harper-Collins, 1996); Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*.

of civil service examinations,”²⁸ which, as these officers were all classically trained, represented a rebalancing of *wen* and *wu* that was closer in alignment with historical norms than the Qing had seen before. More importantly, the prestige associated with Zeng and his lieutenants, who now played in key positions all over the empire, meant that Qing policy would move in a more conservative direction.

To characterize this direction as conservative, however, is not to lose sight of its reformist ambitions. As encapsulated by the slogan, “Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning as Application” (中學為體，西學為用), or “*ti-yong*”, those subscribing to this philosophy advocated for a fusion of philosophies that joined traditional China with the new forms of knowledge introduced by the West. The resulting order would not be the complete revolution that was represented by the Taiping threat, but neither would it be a wholesale reversion to traditional Confucianism, as if the Opium Wars and other foreign incursions had not happened. Proponents would try to work within the system to ensure future generations would be much better equipped to deal with external threats.

The Qing official most associated with this program of action was Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), who served in a number of important offices across his long career, including viceroy of Huguang, the administrative entity that combined Hunan and Hubei. Another *jinshi* concerned with martial matters, he sponsored a number of initiatives that built upon Zeng’s legacy as the ideal embodiment of *wen* and *wu*, but in ways that were more suited for his new *ti-yong* philosophy. These included, but were not limited to, constructing arsenals, founding military academies, and sponsoring students to study as military cadets abroad. In the case of Hunan, Zhang worked with his protégé, the open-minded governor of Hunan Chen Baozhen (1831-1900), to nudge the province away from reflexive anti-foreignism and towards a broader acceptance of foreign ideas. Chen, who took office in 1895, proved to be an ideal partner.²⁹

That same year marked the end of the first Sino-Japanese War, and signaled a new urgency for elites like Zhang and Chen who supported strengthening China and the Qing state by integrating *wen* and *wu* within a new *ti-yong* framework. Humiliation at the hands of Imperial Japan made the prior decades’ efforts to develop a modern military appear futile. Further change was clearly needed, and emulating the newly victorious Japan was a natural choice: the Japanese Meiji Restoration that had begun in 1868 showed how a state could rapidly transform society without the radical social ruptures that seemed to accompany revolutions in other places like France.³⁰ Moreover, this cultural shift clearly had military consequences, adding existential weight to what might have previously been merely an academic exercise: the fate of the empire depended upon change.

In 1897, Zhang and Chen permitted the founding of a new school in Changsha that represented a clear break from the examination-centered classical learning of the past. Called the “School for Current Affairs” (時務學堂), it was directed by Liang Qichao (1873-1929), who supported a version of Confucianism that was oriented around change and progress instead of

²⁸ Platt, *Provincial Patriots*, 28.

²⁹ For more on Zhang, see Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese*, 27-31.

³⁰ Of course, this is an oversimplification of a dramatic transformation that did entail social convulsion, but, relative to the threat of the Taiping, the Meiji policies must have been appealing. For more, see Daikichi Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, trans. Marius B. Jansen (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

conservatism and tradition. Liang, alongside Tang Caichang (1867-1900) and Tan Sitong (1865-1898), two natives of Liuyang, in Eastern Hunan, were the key engines for the flowering of reform over the next year. The three would use the School for Current Affairs, as well as newspapers and study groups, to spread their ideas about political and social reform among their students and peers.³¹

Though the ideas advocated by Liang, Tang, and Tan would ostensibly fit the mold that was sought by Zhang and Chen, they represented something more radical, and unsurprisingly provoked a conservative backlash. The three leaders of this new movement were all classically trained in old examination system, yet their agenda included policies like the abolition of those same exams that had conferred credentials upon them. Though their ideal program of change remained elite-led, some ideas seemed uncomfortably alien: for example, Tan Sitong claimed that China had no privileged access to special knowledge, but was merely one country among many in the world, and criticized Zeng Guofan for having “committed greater atrocities than had the Taiping rebels.”³² Conservative elements of the Hunanese gentry were disturbed by this extreme perspective, and formed counter-reform organizations in response. Viceroy Zhang and Governor Chen signaled their shared concern, and many of those in the leadership of the School for Current Affairs resigned their positions in 1898.³³

By this point, however, the winds of change had found their way to Beijing in a short-lived period where it seemed as though the Qing state was about to embark upon a radical restructuring. In the summer of 1898, the Guangxu emperor issued a flurry of edicts that would have fulfilled many of Liang, Tang, and Tan’s goals. Indeed, the latter two had been summoned to the capital to assist in implementing the very institutional changes they had called for as propagandists in Changsha. The three would go on to champion their ideas at the national level in Peking the next year, and though this effort would end in a coup by traditional conservatives supporting the Empress Dowager Cixi, the exile of Liang to Japan, and the death of Tan, many of their proposals would be largely followed by the Qing in the years afterwards.

For Hunan, however, political reform would have to wait another decade, as the provincial officials after 1898 sided with conservatives among the local gentry to suppress any subversive thought that might lead to anti-Qing rebellion. There were several attempts to foment local uprisings that might lead to empire-wide revolution, but they were discovered and brutally crushed, as in the case of Tang Caichang in 1900.³⁴ For the most part, the Zeng Guofan legacy of Hunanese *wen-wu* integration and reconceptualization that had seemed so promising from 1895-98 was eliminated. Though there remained some faint embers of reformist fervor, Hunan had become a province of conservative thought. The center of possible change for the Qing was now relocated to the national capital in Beijing.

Yuan Shikai, Reformer

Perhaps ironically, one of the senior Qing officials promoting reforms after the 1898 failure was the same individual who has often been blamed for instigating Cixi’s coup: Yuan

³¹ Platt, *Provincial Patriots*, 78-86.

³² Lewis, *Chinese Revolution*, 59.

³³ *Ibid.*, 62-66.

³⁴ Lewis, *Chinese Revolution*, 93-109.

Shikai (1859-1916). From the perspective of balancing new conceptions of *wen* and *wu*, Yuan's political career provides an interesting counterpoint to that of those discussed already, because his success to that point was almost entirely attributable to martial valor as opposed to academic achievement. In nineteenth-century Qing China, officials like Zeng Guofan or Zhang Zhidong, as well as activists like Liang Qichao or Tang Sitong, were all able to contribute their ideas to the public sphere because they had the necessary certification: their performance on the civil service examinations had demonstrated their intellects as well as their cultural capital. Most exam candidates, like Yuan, did not pass these tests, and thus had no opportunity to join public office or the elite class; Yuan rose above this vast majority through military service. He distinguished himself during the violent repression of a mutiny in Korea in 1881, and was thereafter promoted to high office at a very young age. He served as imperial commissioner there for over a decade, and, following the Sino-Japanese war, was asked to create a unit of the Qing army with modern training and equipment.³⁵ Three years of training had given this unit a good reputation, so it was in his role as a commander of what would become known as the "New Army" (新軍) that he was approached by Tan Sitong to support their reform efforts. While it is clear that he thought the 1898 reforms as presented were too radical, his responsibility for the conservative coup is a matter of some historical debate.³⁶

Yuan represented a new path to power that did not rely upon the credibility of the traditional examination system. This is not to say that he lacked training in the Confucian classics, or that came from humble beginnings: he came from an elite family with high officials as close relatives, and was given private tutors to prepare him for the exams and thereby allow preferential treatment in the army.³⁷ Rather, the prestige that enabled his political advancement came from his impressive record as a practitioner of *wu* instead of achievements in *wen*, and thus represented a new way of balancing the two values as well as a reconceptualization of how they could both be applied in a modern setting. Yuan's success with the "New Army" as well as his support for Cixi in 1898 opened up further opportunities for political advancement; he used his skills as an administrator and willingness to advocate for new reforms to seize those opportunities and attain even higher office.

Yuan's successes over the next decade were rapid, and he made sure to implement policies along every stop that would foster leadership along his ideals of *wen* and *wu*. He became governor of Shandong province in 1899, where he ruthlessly suppressed the 1900 Boxer Rebellion, trained another modern army along the same lines as the first, and promoted a number of political reforms that would presage his support of the New Policies to come. He was elevated in 1901 to the position of Zhili Viceroy, where his support for political, military, and social reform intensified: he created the first modern police force in China, financed new state enterprises, and banned traditional practices like footbinding and opium smoking. He also dramatically transformed the provincial education system in quantity (enrollments exploded by a factor of 25 within five years) as well as quality, as it was identified as a national model for emulation by the Qing court. In other words, Yuan's concerns over *wen* and *wu* were not

³⁵ Shan, *Yuan Shikai*, 32-71.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-87; Shan offers a summary of the traditional perspective, wherein Yuan is the traitor whose actions precipitated the conservative coup against Guangxu and the reformists, as well as a revisionist view that dismisses his culpability in this matter.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-31.

limited to military reform alone; he also sought to transform and modernize Qing civilians as well.³⁸

With Zhili in close proximity to Peking, Yuan's successes as Viceroy gave him immense influence in the Qing New Policies that proposed the institutionalization of many of the suggestions made by activists like Tan Sitong in 1898. He was a key figure in pushing the Qing court to agree to systemic reform in the direction of a constitutional monarchy, in direct emulation of the Japanese system, which was a platform that would inspire future legal scholars during the early years of the Chinese Republic.³⁹ Building upon his accomplishments with educational reform in Zhili, Yuan joined Zhang Zhidong and other ministers in successfully petitioning for the 1905 abolition of the civil service examinations, signaling a complete break with the traditional past and complete reconceptualization of *wen*. He also continued his re-imagining of *wu* in the modern era, retraining and reequipping the imperial forces in the image of the "New Army;" because of his position as Superintendent of Trade in the Northern Ports, or Beiyang Dachen (北洋大臣), these new troops would be called the "Beiyang Army." To produce sufficient numbers of officers to staff this new force, Yuan created an entire ten-year system of military education, with the cream of the crop sent to Japan for further instruction. Unfortunately for Yuan, his position was tied to his relationship with Cixi, so upon her death in 1909, he was forced into retirement. Directed by the Qing Court to return to his home province of Henan, he grudgingly acquiesced and spent three years in quasi-exile, writing poetry, raising funds for public works, and maintaining his high profile in the last years of the Qing.⁴⁰ Doing so, Yuan adopted many of the behaviors practiced by prior generations of officials upon departing public life, signaling his support for traditional forms of *wen* behavior. Pairing these acts with his reputation as the empire's foremost innovator of *wu*, he was clearly positioning himself for a possible return to prominence. The outbreak of revolution in 1911 enabled these preparations to come to fruition.

Four Young Men of Hunan

It was in the context of failed reform and gradual state-led change that the principle figures of this dissertation—Zhao Hengti, Li Jiannong, Tao Juyin, and Tan Yankai—came of age. All were born into positions of relative privilege, receiving educations in the Confucian classics that would prepare them for intellectual vocations like teaching or government service. All four would also play key roles in the 1920 mutiny: Zhao and Tan as rivals for power; Li and Tao as witnesses to these events who would later integrate this incident into the larger narrative of the Warlord Era. The choices that these four elites made as young men illustrate the range of options available to ambitious men of their generation as the Qing state and the dynastic system both came apart.

Of the four men, Tan Yankai was of the most elite background. He was born in January of 1880, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, where his father, Tan Zhonglin (1822-1905) was a *xunfu*, or civil governor. The elder Tan, 58 at the time of Yankai's birth, was a senior Han

³⁸ On the transformation of Zhili provincial education, see Reynolds, *China 1898–1912*, 83-84. On Yuan's policies in Shandong and Zhili more generally, see Shan, *Yuan Shikai*, 88-126.

³⁹ Reynolds, *China 1898–1912*, 186-191

⁴⁰ Shan, *Yuan Shikai*, 136-143.

Chinese official in the Manchu Qing bureaucracy who had been awarded the *jinshi* degree in 1856, and had enjoyed a steady rise up the ranks ever since. After his son was born, Tan Zhonglin went on later that year to serve as *xunfu* in Shaanxi province before rising to rank of viceroy administering that province and neighboring Gansu in 1881. He subsequently held the same rank for Liangguang, where his administration suppressed the 1895 Guangzhou Uprising of Sun Yatsen, and where his conservative opposition to the Hundred Days Reform of 1898 earned him praise from the Empress Dowager Cixi. After retiring to Changsha in 1899, he died six years later.⁴¹

Tan Yankai himself seemed destined for an equally stellar career in the bureaucracy. At an early age, he was identified as a prodigy. The imperial tutor Weng Tonghe (1830-1904) was a peer of the elder Tan, and occupied a number of important posts in the civil bureaucracy during the 1880s and 1890s. In his diary, he recalls meeting his colleague's 13-year old son, and remarking that the boy was possibly a genius in writing.⁴² Weng's observations were prophetic. Tan Yankai would go on to pass all three levels of the civil service examination, culminating in the award for highest score in the nation on the 1904 exams. He was granted a position as a compiler with the Hanlin Academy as a result, and it appeared as though he would follow along the same conventional and conservative trajectory as his father fifty years before.⁴³

However, this basic outline of his initial academic successes overlooks a number of interesting features about Tan's early life that suggest a far more complicated perspective on traditional Chinese culture and presage his post-1911 successes. Without these peculiarities, his transition from the model and stereotypical scholar-official of the dynastic system to becoming a fairly progressive and modern politician would be even more jarring. The high official position of his father with the Qing state would appear to fit the idea that he was groomed and pampered for a bright future. While this is certainly true when compared to the vast majority of his peers across China, this portrayal ignores the difficulties he encountered as the son of a former maidservant to his elder brother. The only reason Tan Zhonglin, at the relatively elderly age of 56, took a new concubine and had three more sons, was that he noticed they shared the same unusual birthmark on the soles of their feet. Because of her former status as a servant, she and her sons were treated poorly by the rest of their family until Tan Yankai won a position at the Hanlin Academy. It is unclear what sort of direct effect this combination of privileged upbringing and low social status this might have had on the young Tan, but it surely must have inculcated some level of discomfort with the established Confucian social order.⁴⁴

⁴¹ For more on Tan Zhonglin, see Tan Yankai 譚延闓, 譚文勤公行狀 [A Brief Obituary of Tan Wenqin] in Zhou Qiuguang 周秋光, ed., 譚延闓集 [Works of Tan Yankai], 2 Vols., (Changsha: Hunan People's Press, 2013), 849-860; Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese*, 726.

⁴² Weng Tonghe 翁同龢, 翁同龢日記 [Diary of Weng Tonghe] (Shanghai: Zhongxi Shuju, 2012), January 24, 1892. Original: “訪文卿，見其第三子，秀發，年十三，所作制義奇橫可喜，殆非常之才也。”

⁴³ Xu Chongli 許崇立, 譚祖安先生年譜初編 [Draft Biographical Chronicle of Mr. Tan Zu'an] (Taipei: Zhongguo Jiaotong Jianshe Xuehui Zongjingxiao, 1964; Chen Lu'an 陳履安, “秩序” [Forward] in Liu Jianqiang, ed., 譚延闓文集, 論稿 [Works by and Essays on Tan Yankai] (Xiangtan City: Xiangtan University Press, 2015). Chen, his grandson, gives Tan's courtesy name, or 字, as 祖庵; it is unclear why Xu renders his name here as 祖安. Chen's name is often romanized into English as “Chen Li-an.”

⁴⁴ Zhong Boyi, describes the reaction of the elder Tan as follows: 凡女人腳底生痣，必生貴子也, in Zhong Boyi 鍾伯毅, 鍾伯毅先生訪問紀錄 [Record of Interviews with Zhong Boyi]. (Taipei, Taiwan: Institute of Modern History,

Tan's support for progressive and modern education also complicates any image of him as a stereotypical conservative Confucian scholar. In 1903, he contributed a large sum of money to the new Mingde Academy (明德學堂) in Changsha, the first private school in the province that explicitly eschewed a focus on preparing students for the examinations. This organization also attracted a number of radical Hunanese to its faculty who would attempt to foment revolution in the last years of the Qing. For his first job after leaving the Hanlin Academy, Tan served as principal of the Changsha Middle Road Academy (長沙中路學堂) from 1905-1906, and pushed the curriculum in a direction that was modeled on the Japanese system, possibly in emulation of Yuan Shikai's successes in Zhili. His progressive inclinations, though perhaps not as radical as some of his peers, are worth noting.⁴⁵

Finally, one of his answers on the 1904 civil service examination signals the same ambiguity concerning his position on conventional wisdom. The first question on the exam called for candidates to compare and contrast the decentralized Zhou and Tang systems of governance with the far more centralized Qin and Wei states.⁴⁶ In his response, Tan argued that the "fengjian" ([封建] often glossed as "feudal") system of the Zhou were suitable for that time of relative decentralization, until it ended in disaster; its replacement by the "junxian" ([郡縣] or "prefectural") system of the Qin, featuring a much stronger emperor, was a natural progression towards a more harmonious society that benefited both the people and the state, and suited the subsequent era much better. Similarly, the attempt during the Tianbao (天寶) era (742-756) of the Tang dynasty (618-907) to devolve local governance to various military governors, or "fanzhen," (藩鎮) failed to address local conditions, leading to the fall of the dynasty. In short, Tan was telling his exam reviewers that the successful governance of a polity requires adaptation and flexibility to meet current needs and local conditions. One might expect a traditional scholar of the Confucian classics to rely on theoretical frameworks to craft an answer, but Tan's response suggested a much more nuanced and pragmatic perspective that portended his later turn towards republicanism and federalism. For him, it seems as though flexibility was more important than fidelity with regards to the application of past examples to present-day problems. This attitude explains his adaptability under various regimes over the next 25 years: as a local elite during the Qing New Policies, as provincial governor and proponent of local autonomy during the early Republic, and as Party Elder during the first few years of the Nanjing decade. While some might critique these different personae as the inconsistency of a power-hungry opportunist, Tan's willingness to change his method of governance to fit his political circumstances should also be positively interpreted as well.⁴⁷

As the New Policies championed by Yuan Shikai were growing in popularity and influence, Tan moved into a more prominent role as the leader of the Hunanese gentry. At first, this was an informal position, based largely upon the social connections he had inherited from

Academia Sinica, 1992), 10. For more on Tan's mother, see also Tan Yankai 譚延闓, 譚母李太夫人訃告 [Obituary for Mrs. Tan, neé Li] in Zhou, ed. *Tan Yankai Ji*, 872.

⁴⁵ Chen Lu'an, "Forward;" Liyan Liu, *Red Genesis: The Hunan Normal School and the Creation of Chinese Communism, 1903-1921* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 34-35.

⁴⁶ Tan Yankai, "会试闹墨" [Selected Answers from Civil Service Examinations] (March 1904) in Zhou, ed., *Works*, 821-842. Original: 周唐外重内轻, 秦魏外轻内重各有得失论

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

his father as well as the prestige he retained from his famous high score on the abolished civil service exams. This began with his position with the Hunan First Normal School, and continued with his leadership over the “Hunan Constitution Association” (湖南憲政公會) that provided a platform for elites to press for a formal provincial assembly that could represent their interests. The ideal of the constitution was linked to the rule of law and provincial autonomy, in opposition to the unlimited despotism of the dynastic central state. Thus, when the Qing Court promulgated a law in early 1909 allowing for the creation of provincial assemblies, Tan became the leader of the Hunan Consultative Office (湖南諮議局), which represented the interests of the provincial elite to the central government.

This summary of Tan’s life suggests an “insider” path for late Qing elites in the last years of the dynasty: advancing within the structures of the Qing state, accumulating cultural and social capital, and signaling support for modernization efforts, particularly in education. In this, Tan’s political career was not dramatically different from the scholar-elite of the generations prior, being based upon the prestige of his family and his examination scores to maintain influence; even without being appointed to office by the Qing court, his cultural capital and social prestige remained an asset. This could also be interpreted as an extreme use of past *wen* norms to attain power in a changing society.

In contrast, Zhao Hengti chose a different path to success, oriented not on “inner” traditions, but on foreign knowledge. Though also born to an elite family in Hunan, his background was far less prestigious than that of Tan, and had no connections to the Qing court or past relatives in positions of imperial prominence. The self-presentation of the Zhaos nevertheless indicate some pretense to greatness. The Zhaos were based in Hengyang, a major city in Southern Hunan, and able to trace their ancestry back to the Song Dynasty. They engaged the young Hengti in the sorts of activities that traditional gentry families were known to do in the late Qing: practice poetry, discuss Neo-Confucian philosophy, and the like. Such training would have helped Hengti to pursue traditional scholarship in the civil service examination. Yet by sending him to the newly renamed Hubei Translation School (湖北方言學堂) in Wuchang, his family broke with classical educational norms. The school had originally been founded by Zhang Zhidong in 1893 as the Self-Strengthening Academy (自強學堂). Following the New Policies trends emanating from Beijing, the school was renamed in 1900 to focus explicitly on Western languages and learning. Zhao only spent a short time there before passing the examination to be sent to Japan under state sponsorship.⁴⁸

Zhao’s orientation to the outside world eventually led him to taking a far more modernized *wu*-oriented road to power. Zhao arrived in Japan expecting to study education at a teacher’s college; he quickly changed paths with the expectation that military matters would be more beneficial to his nation. It is unclear whether or not this shift was explicitly inspired by the example set by Yuan Shikai’s rebalancing and re-conception of *wen* and *wu*, but the connection can be inferred. Zhao’s first three years in Japan following his 1901 arrival were

⁴⁸ Zhao Hengti 趙恆惕. “聯省自治前後：湖南參議會趙恆惕議長訪問記錄 [The Beginning and the End of Provincial Autonomy: An Interview with Hunan Provincial Assembly Chair Zhao Hengti],” in 口述歷史第一期 [Oral History, Vol 1], ed. Wu Dayou. (Taipei, Taiwan: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1989), 43-76. While Esherick, *Reform and Revolution*, and McDonald, *Urban Origins*, insist that Zhao was a provincial degree (*juren*) holder, he makes no such claim himself, instead claiming that he missed the cutoff (49).

spent at the Japanese Military School, or *Shibu Gakko* (日本振武學校), a special institution set up by Japan's Army General Staff to prepare Chinese military students for further training. He passed the entrance exam for the Japanese Imperial Army Academy, or *Shikan Gakko* (日本士官學校), where he studied artillery and was a member of the sixth cohort of Chinese military cadets. There, he formed close bonds with many classmates and overseas Chinese students in Japan, especially those from Hunan, and was introduced to the revolutionary movement.⁴⁹

Many of the Chinese who studied in Japan during the first decade of the twentieth century rose to positions of political prominence in the years following 1911. Of these, three Hunanese—Huang Xing (1874-1916), Song Jiaoren, and Cai E (1882-1916)—represent the wide range of options available to those who wished to pursue new possibilities for reconceptualization and integration of *wen* and *wu* norms in a way that might also resonate with efforts by their traditional literati predecessors. These men, like Zhao, were of same generation, had similar backgrounds, and shared the same desire to lead their nation into modernity via revolutionary means. The untimely death of all three, within five years of the 1911 revolution, had unforeseen consequences for how politics would be practiced during the early Republic.

Huang Xing represents an extreme version of *wu* in his preference for direct action and open confrontation. A native of the Hunan capital of Changsha, he had been sponsored by Zhang Zhidong in 1902 to study aboard at the Kobun Institute, or *Kobun Gakuin* (弘文学院), a school whose sole purpose was to prepare Chinese students for further education in Japan, but quickly became enamored with military training and radicalized towards revolution. He returned to Changsha in 1903 in an attempt to foment an anti-Qing uprising, while teaching at the same Mingde Academy that had been partially financed by Tan Yankai. However, Huang's plot was quickly discovered in 1905 and he was forced to return to Japan. Over the next decade he would lead several other failed revolutions in different parts of South China before becoming one of the commanders of the revolutionary forces against the Qing in late 1911, and a key leader of the KMT during the first years of the Republic.⁵⁰

Song Jiaoren, one of Huang's 1905 co-conspirators who followed him to Japan, represents the opposite extreme of *wen*. A native of Taoyuan, a relatively isolated village in northern Hunan, he was equally passionate about the revolutionary cause but chose to forgo a military education for more literary pursuits. In Japan, he was an editor of the People's Journal (*Minbao*, 民報), in which he and his equally erudite colleagues wrote essays vigorously advocating for the violent overthrow of the Qing. To this end, the journal not only attacked the Qing state, but also the reformist point of view represented by Liang Qichao, which they viewed as diverting needed resources and attention from their agenda. This rivalry between the revolutionary and reformist camps was not only intellectual, but became physical on at least two occasions. Following six years largely spent in Japan, Song left for Shanghai in 1911 to

⁴⁹ Ibid, 49-50. See also Reynolds, *China 1898-1911*, for more about these two educational institutions.

⁵⁰ Stephen Platt, *Provincial Patriots*, 98-101; 125-130. For more on Huang, see also Chun-tu Hsueh [Xue Jundu], *Huang Hsing and the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1961), one of the only English-language biographies of Huang. Perhaps because he is the son-in-law of his subject, the author makes every possible effort to paint Huang in a positive light and credit him with the successes of the 1911 Revolution.

continue work as an anti-Qing propagandist and political journalist before becoming one of the new Republic's more prominent politicians after its founding.⁵¹

If Huang Xing and Song Jiaoren represent two extremes of the *wen-wu* spectrum, Cai E represents a Yuan Shikai-like balance between the two. Born in Shaoyang, in southwestern Hunan, he was a student at the School for Current Affairs in Changsha for a short time before leaving for Japan in 1899. He participated in Tang Caichang's failed rebellion in 1900 before escaping back to Japan, where he was one of the earliest Chinese graduates from the Japanese Imperial Army Academy in 1904. While in Japan, he authored an influential article in Liang Qichao's reformist periodical that called for all Chinese to undergo some military training, as citizen-soldiers would be the best possible contributors to the strength of the state. His participation in the 1900 rebellion was not discovered, and so from 1904-1910, he commanded the Guangxi military academy, which put him in a position to find and mentor other like-minded revolutionaries.⁵²

Zhao Hengti would form close relationships with all three fellow Hunanese, but especially Cai E. Zhao's 1908 graduation from the Japanese Imperial Army Academy coincided with the deaths of the Empress Dowager Cixi and the Guangxi emperor. Their passing caused the Qing court to fear the revolutionary potential of so many overseas students, prompting Zhao and many of his fellow cadets to be recalled home instead of undergoing further training as probationary officers in the Japanese Army. Following a brief stint as a staff officer and examination administrator at Qing army headquarters, he was recruited to work with Cai E in Guangxi as an instructor of cadets.⁵³

When the Wuchang revolution broke out in October 1911, Zhao was placed in charge of a detachment of Guangxi cadets and dispatched to the front in support of the revolutionaries. Travel to Wuchang necessitated transit through Hunan, where he first encountered Tan Yankai, who proposed a Hunan-Guangxi alliance when the fighting was over, foreshadowing their relationship in the decade to come. Zhao continued towards the frontlines in Xiaogan, where he commanded the left flank in a stalemate that lasted three months.⁵⁴

The choices made by Tan and Zhao were not the only options available to the ambitious elite of their generation: the decision by Li Jiannong to become a journalist and essayist represent a much more modern choice. Li was also born in 1880 in what is now Longhui County, in southwestern Hunan, near the birthplace of Cai E. He attended a private school, and then the county classical academy, receiving a Confucian education from a young age like Tan and Zhao. However, unlike Tan and Zhao, he came from a peasant family, and exhibited anti-traditional sentiment from a young age. He wrote a poem that compared Confucian officials to amoral bureaucrats, wanting only money, indicating the degree of disgust he had for the traditional social order.

It is unclear whether or not he took the civil service exams as a young man, but, starting in 1904, Li did spend four years at the Changsha Middle Road Academy, the same school that

⁵¹ K.S. Liew, *Struggle for Democracy: Sung Chiao-Jen and the 1911 Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 49-53, 85-6.

⁵² Donald S. Sutton, *Provincial Militarism and the Chinese Republic: The Yunnan Army, 1905-25*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 81-82; Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity*, 255-56.

⁵³ Zhao, "Interview," 50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

Tan Yankai would later head for a brief period of time. There, Li studied history. Though this advanced education suggests that Li oriented his life around more *wen*-based values, his anti-traditionalist attitude was only radicalized further: after joining the Revolutionary Alliance in 1906, Li continued at the school as an instructor, where he did his best to inculcate revolutionary sentiment in his students. In 1910, he moved to Japan to study political economy at Waseda University in Japan, where he became even more embedded within the organization of Revolutionary Alliance and established relationships with Song Jiaoren and Huang Xing. In the fall of his second year, the Wuchang Uprising began, and he quickly rushed back to China to join the revolution.⁵⁵

In Wuchang, Li assembled an account of the fighting that would be circulated in the newspapers, and launched him upon the vocation of political journalism. While it is unclear precisely when he was able to arrive in Wuchang, he spent his time there observing the fighting and collecting information from those who had participated. His report was published in the newspaper *Minguo Ribao* a few months later as “Remembering the Whole Story of The Wuchang Revolution,” (武昌革命始末記) which recounted in great detail the troop movements and skirmishes that comprised the larger battle.

According to Li, the Revolutionary Army, which he also called the “people’s army” (民軍) was able to prevail over the imperial forces because of their high morale and courageous attitude. Led by Li Yuanhong (1864-1928), the revolutionaries were aware of the larger import of their fight, distributing propaganda materials in multiple languages to the various foreign consuls who were stationed in the area, and sending emissaries to encourage uprisings all over the nation. Initially, they enjoyed several victories over the imperial forces, allowing them to take over all three of the area’s major cities surrounding the intersection of the Yangzi and Han rivers: Wuchang, Hankou, and Hanyang. However, fierce fighting prompted their retreat to Wuchang, as well as a change in leadership with the newly arrived Huang Xing replacing Li Yuanhong, who had only very reluctantly taken command. Because pockets of revolutionary resistance remained in Hankou, the imperial forces razed the city, creating a refugee crisis that prompted a rebuke from local elites, as well as a cease-fire.⁵⁶

Li’s chronicle of the Wuchang uprising is worth noting because of its clear objective in attracting support for the revolutionary cause through readable and vivid description. In his account, the government troops were victorious only due to their superior arms and numbers, and because they had a gunboat to provide fire support that the revolutionaries could not match. The imperial forces were the clear villains of the battle, looting, raping, and setting fire to the homes of innocent bystanders. By contrast, the revolutionary army were the heroes, acting with perfect propriety, respecting the lives and property of the local residents. In spite of

⁵⁵ Hua Chu 华初. “政治經濟家李劍農,” [Political Economist Li Jiannong] in 隆回文史資料 [Historical and Cultural Materials of Longhui], Vol 3. Longhui: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988. 61-65.

⁵⁶ Later collected as Li Jiannong 李劍農, “武昌革命始末記,” [Record of the Beginning and Ending of the Wuchang Revolution] in *Minguo Bao*, 第 2 期, 1-4 页 (1911). Online edition accessed via the 全国报刊索引 (National Index of Periodicals) database: <http://www.cnbkys.com/search/detail/37c1086e6645cb9a14e567ed84178ba9/7/5d511f4323b0997c37d8e88c>

this ethical behavior, higher morale, and greater courage, they lost several battles.⁵⁷ Moreover, Li hinted that Li Yuanhong was not as respected as Huang Xing, when he asserted that morale skyrocketed after Huang's arrival.⁵⁸ His framing of the narrative not only encouraged readers to support Huang and the revolutionaries, but also gave him a key role to play in shaping public opinion in how the conflict is remembered. In a sense, this is an extreme version how a *wen*-oriented elite might influence the making of modern China.

Tao Juyin was another Hunanese elite who leveraged his education and composition skills to shape his nation. Born in 1898, he was almost two decades younger than Li, Tan, and Zhao. The Taos originally hailed from Nanjing, where his father taught Chinese medicine. The younger Tao moved with his family to Changsha, where he was admitted to the same Mingde Academy where Huang Xing had taught some years prior. While there, Tao demonstrated a precocious aptitude for the journalism, publishing a short article in the major Shanghai Daily *Shibao* (時報) on February 12, 1910, titled "Remembering the Feeling of this Day Last Year" (記去年今日有感) that satirized the seemingly unchanging state of politics. That his short article, however childish, was published in a major newspaper gave Tao much delight, and signaled not only the fact that he could succeed as a writer, but that he could forgo further formal education in order to join the profession of journalism.⁵⁹ Though still a student when word of the Wuchang Uprising reached Changsha, this would not be the case much longer: in 1912, at the age of 14, Tao would become a full-time editor with the *Women's Rights Daily* (*Nvquan Ribao*). Reform and revolution had opened up new educational and vocational opportunities for young men.

Conclusion

Too often, intellectual conceptions of "Confucian China" center on the imperial court as the locus of tradition and the seat of power; legitimate dynastic succession, or "zhengtong," [正統] required unity through a supposed continuance of that cultural heritage. By shifting our perspective between Beijing or Beiyang and Hunan, we can discern the dynamic ways that elite reformers defended Chinese traditions in creative ways, in dialogue with centers of power. As power dissolved from the center, the geopolitical importance of Hunan grew as a center of conservative reform.

During these years, new educational trends, informed by new views of both *wen* and *wu*, played a significant role in the formation of generations of so-called reformers and revolutionaries. Zeng Guofan's tent government helped to introduce new vocational opportunities for those who had sought and further solidified by exams for returned students from abroad in the latter part of the Qing, young men like Zhao Hengti could opt to learn modern subjects, and even to receive government funding to go abroad. As indicated by Yuan Shikai's pioneering example with reform efforts, Japan served as both a model for and a center for many of these efforts. One of the most important centers was the Japanese Military School

⁵⁷ Ibid., Original: 實因北軍中有開花彈。有機器砲。而革命軍無之。北軍又有兵艦之助。而革命軍無之。北軍不按戰律。不顧人民財產。性命。而革命軍反之。故而致敗。

⁵⁸ Ibid. Original: 由黃興先登將台。黎都督付與印信與軍令。一時軍心。為之大振。

⁵⁹ Tao Juyin 陶菊隱. *Tao Juyin Huiyi Lu* 陶菊隱回憶錄 [Memoirs of Tao Juyin]. Taipei: Hanjing Culture Company, 2004 (Originally published as *Jizhe Shenghuo Sanshi Nian* 記者生活三十年 [Thirty Years as a Journalist] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984), 3.

as a training ground for a modernized military elite. Within Hunan, important schools were the Changsha Middle Road Academy and the Mingde Academy, which became centers for particular political environments.

In stories of revolution, elites are often considered the most disinclined toward necessary and urgent change. Instead, elites turn toward reform in order to protect their own privileged status. It is true that elite status meant a heightened sensitivity to the statecraft accomplishments of the past, such as those of Zeng Guofan; future generations inherited that sense of responsibility and the legacy of conservative reform. However, in the historical view of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hunan, elite status also often entailed a superior alertness to emerging trends from beyond the province thanks to the networks of literacy and print that were above and beyond the commoners of the province. Hence, Tan and Zhao were both guardians of a provincially based tradition and first-respondents to trans-provincial trends of change.

The elective affinity between the elite class of the late Qing and reformist trends in the new Republic enabled men like Zhao and Tan to attain influence, power, and high office. However, because of this, they were unable to take advantage of the rhetoric of revolution that was designed to have more mass appeal. Their training in the classics and familiarity with elite networks did not necessarily preclude them from participation in the organizations and instruments of mass politics like newspapers or campaign rallies; after all, some of their revolutionary counterparts shared the same background. But the habits and culture that most belonging to this class had developed as young men were not conducive for establishing a persona as outsiders who could appeal to more modern sensibilities, like Mao and Sun were able to do. As a result, though some of the programs and policies that these elites proposed, like federalism, would be substantively revolutionary, their inability to appropriately frame these concepts for popular consumption doomed them to the conservative dustbin of history.

Chapter 2: Reform, Revolution, and the Future of China

Introduction

This chapter reevaluates the early years of the Republic of China from a standpoint of reform rather than revolution, and covers the period between the 1911 Revolution and 1916, when three key figures in Chinese politics—Yuan Shikai, Cai E, and Huang Xing—died. As epitomized by Li Jiannong's *Political History*, the narrative of 1911-1916 period emphasizes how the revolution was betrayed, both by Yuan Shikai in his 1913 attack on the KMT and 1916 ill-fated attempt to become emperor as well as by the reformers in their earlier support for Yuan and their belated criticism after. Consequently, their reputation was tainted as being overly conservative, thus contributing to a widely perceived dichotomy between their ideals with that of the revolutionaries. It is too easy to follow the teleology of revolution and to assume that reformers belonged to a bygone era. However, when addressing the complexities of the "warlord period," it is necessary to acknowledge that these rival epistemologies existed in concert with each other.

There has been an over-emphasis on revolution instead of reform in interpretations of the political, social, and cultural changes that swept through the nation during these years. While this is partly due to the far more visible and performative aspects of revolution, being defined as change from the outside that overturns the established order, this chapter also argues that the idea of vision and ideology that so often motivates revolution is also a key factor in the favor it enjoys over reform in historical memory. This chapter will suggest that Li Jiannong's influential narrative of Chinese history, covering the period from the First Opium War to the 1928 Northern Expedition, epitomizes and establishes the dichotomy between these two concepts of reform and revolution. Favoring one over the other as the ideal solution for advancing the nation and state into the future is aptly demonstrated by the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny, the subsequent transfer of power from Tan Yankai to Zhao Hengti, and their tenures at the apex of Hunan's provincial political and military structures. Their choice to adopt pragmatic and reform-oriented approaches to governance and eschew the more ideologically-oriented revolutionary vision that animated the future success of KMT and CCP did not suit the growing influence of mass politics. Consequently, their limited successes are overlooked, by Li and those who followed thereafter, in the broader narrative favoring revolution.

Twentieth-century Chinese history has often been recounted as a progression of revolutions that broke the metaphorical shackles of tradition and led the nation towards modernity. The 1911 Xinhai revolution that ended both the Qing dynasty as well as the imperial order that had defined the ideals by which China had been governed for over two millennia was a landmark event. Yet, to paraphrase historian Joseph Levenson, this transition was a failure, though not a mistake: those with power in 1911 retained power afterwards despite the abolition of the Qing court.¹ Indeed, the 1911 Revolution's destruction of the imperial system, without any strong central government to replace it, is often portrayed as leading directly to the factionalism of the warlord era.

¹ Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

It is worth noting that a focus on revolution is one of the few commonalities that historians in the PRC and Taiwan share. On the one hand, this shared focus speaks to the unmistakable importance of the 1911 and 1949 revolutions to twentieth-century Chinese history, with a dynastic system of governance that had more or less endured as an ideal over two millennia dramatically collapsing in the first case, and a radical restructuring of society and economy in the second. Yet emphasizing revolution also serves the purpose of both the ROC and PRC governments, since both states justify their existence and authority as having rescued the nation from the chaos of the immediate post-1911 era.

English-language studies of twentieth century China can also hardly avoid an emphasis on revolution. The focus of textbooks like Peter Zarrow's *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949*, Rana Mitter's *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle With the Modern World*, or Keith Schoppa's *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History* can be easily discerned from their titles.² While this interpretive framework makes sense given the overall telos of Chinese history, this dissertation suggests an alternative, non-teleological reading of the early years of the revolution. This revisionist approach has even extended to Yuan Shikai's presidency in the early years of the Republic, as the archvillain of modern Chinese history has begun to be recognized for his efforts to implement gradual political reform, and his catastrophic attempt at crowning himself emperor begins to be reconsidered as his failure to appreciate popular opinion. Given this revisionist historical framework, this chapter re-examines the conventional historiography as a lens for deconstructing the revolutionary narrative.³

The chapter begins with a brief summary of how the 1911 Revolution unfolded in Hunan, with the murder of its first governor that has been interpreted as the reassertion of gentry elite power, and that somewhat augurs the division between elites and the masses that would prompt the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny. After briefly using unpublished archival material to challenge the stereotype of stagnant and useless local provincial governance, focus is shifted to the national level, and the assassination of Song Jiaoren that signaled the beginning of the end for the moderate reform movement, as interpreted by Li Jiannong's *Political History*. The chapter continues with an examination of the reformist national constitution, often critiqued for its toothlessness, before closing with the power vacuum that resulted from 1916 deaths of Yuan Shikai, Huang Xing, and Cai E, and that prompted the beginnings of High Warlordism.

The Aftermath of the 1911 Revolution in Hunan

The Wuchang uprising was not a resounding military success, but the event sparked the hoped-for nationwide rebellion, and led to the collapse of the Qing and the dynastic system. As

² Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle With the Modern World* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2016); Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (Routledge, 2005).

³ An article demonstrating the persistent influence of the revolutionary paradigm in the Post-Mao era is Jin Chongji, "The 1911 Revolution and the Awakening of the Chinese Nation," in Shinkichi and Schiffrin, eds., *The 1911 Revolution in China*, 3-17. For a more recent argument that continues to stress the transformative ruptures presented by revolution, see Chen, Jianhua, "The Discursive Turn of 'Revolution' and the Revolutionary Turn of 'Discourse: From Late Qing Until the End of 1920s,'" in *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, Vol. 44., No. 1., (Fall 2012), pp. 8-35.

noted by Li's description of the initial stages of the uprising discussed in the previous chapter, the correlation of forces was extremely adverse for the revolutionary side in terms of both arms and men. By late November, Hanyang and Hankou had both returned to Qing government control; the Qing forces reported only seventy casualties, though the true figure was almost certainly far higher, possibly even reaching 2,000 dead. Revolutionary losses, on the other hand, far exceeded those of the Qing, with one observer estimating that over 5,000 rebels were killed in the fierce fighting.⁴

In spite of these military defeats, the extended conflict in the Wuchang area had achieved its goal and inspired revolution in other parts of the empire. On October 22, Hunan became among the first to declare for the Republican cause, with Shanghai and 13 other provinces following thereafter. It soon became clear that popular and elite support for the Qing was low, with ethnicity-based attacks on Manchus and counter-attacks on Han Chinese growing in frequency and intensity. Moreover, both the Qing and the revolutionaries were running extremely short on funds to finance their respective armies, and so cease-fire was offered, and an agreement negotiated whereby the empire would be converted into a republic and the emperor would "willingly" abdicate.

The individual who inherited the highest executive authority from the Qing court was Yuan Shikai. The former New Army commander and reformist official had been forced into retirement in 1908 because of his close ties to the Empress Dowager, but now his prestige and military expertise were urgently needed. This desperation as well as his subsequent military victories over the revolutionaries led to Yuan becoming the natural successor to the defeated emperor as the empire transitioned into a republic. His reputation as a capable administrator and experience with national politics made him one of the only possible candidates to lead the new state, and he assumed the post of second provisional president in March of 1912. The Qing court was pensioned off, and the national revolution, in spite of its bloody beginning, seemed to end with a bloodless whimper.

In contrast, the transition away from Qing rule in Hunan was far more violent and treacherous. The Wuchang Uprising of October 11, 1911 took place in Hubei, the province immediately to the north of Hunan, and news reached Changsha within days. On the 22nd of that month, the provincial governor fled, and the military commander was killed. Initially, there was an expectation that Tan Yankai, who had been leader of the Provincial Assembly for a few years by that point, would take over as governor in the post-Qing era. However, a young revolutionary named Jiao Dafeng (1886-1911) announced that his close ties to the Wuchang "revolutionaries" made him the best fit for the position, and he took over. His tenure as military governor lasted only about ten days before he and his deputy were assassinated; Tan Yankai assumed his place, and would serve as chief executive of Hunan province for about two years. It is useful to return to the *wen-wu* framework to contrast Jiao Dafeng with Tan Yankai. Jiao was born to an affluent family in Liuyang, the same county just east of Changsha as Tan Sitong and Tang Caichang. However, perhaps because he was of a later generation, he joined the revolutionary cause at a much younger age, forgoing the civil service examinations and joining

⁴ Figures from Shan, *Yuan Shikai*, 150-51, who draws from Yuan's initial reports to the court, as well as the observations of Francis Stafford, as quoted in Hanchao Lu, *Birth of a Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

the local militia. After some engagement with failed anti-Qing uprisings, he fled to Japan in 1906, where he was “a rather undistinguished student at a railway school after being denied admission to any of the military academies.”⁵ While in Tokyo, he joined the Revolutionary Alliance like so many other young anti-Qing overseas Chinese, but soon left that group to help create the Forward Together Society (公進會). This group sought to organize the various local gangs and brotherhoods to which peasant and underclass urbanite youths belonged—known as secret societies—into a coherent empire-wide force as a way to bring down the Qing. In short, Jiao not only seemed to lack all of Tan Yankai’s *wen* credentials that might otherwise have appealed to the Hunanese gentry elite, but he was also deficient in the *wu* prestige that he might have otherwise attained through attending one of the military academies or gaining experience with the New Army. Indeed, Jiao represented the so-called dregs of society, in sharp contrast to Tan Yankai’s elite pedigree. In this, the disparity in social status between the two presages the events of November 1920, when Tan’s inability to expand his support beyond the elite led directly to the mutiny that prompted his resignation.

Social status and an inability to fulfill established cultural expectations concerning *wen* and *wu* were a key factor behind Jiao’s murder. His youth and casual attitude towards social propriety did not inspire confidence, and he made little effort to ingratiate himself with the gentry elite.⁶ Had he demonstrated a greater facility with the expected norms of civilized behavior, or evinced *wen*, perhaps he could have gained greater legitimacy in the eyes of local power-holders. Moreover, Jiao seemed incompetent in *wu* matters as well; he was assassinated by dissatisfied members of the New Army who questioned his ability to lead the provincial military. The leader of the group that killed him was Mei Xing (1878-1928), a New Army officer and graduate of the Japanese Officers Academy whom Jiao had ordered to Jiangxi on little rest and without sufficient supplies. Showing more respect for Mei’s experience and training might have placated those military elements that would otherwise have supported his administration.

One aspect of his assassination warrants further scrutiny: the culpability of Tan Yankai and other gentry in inspiring Mei to action. Esherick, relying on oral histories from those involved, is unsparing in assessing blame. He writes, “there is little doubt that Tan Yankai had assented to the revolutionary plot [to kill Jiao]—if he had not in fact directed it.”⁷ It warrants highlighting that this kind of betrayal, of a revolutionary by a reformer, fits the national conception of how history is made wherein the initial revolution was truncated by the machinations of elites. Here, the gentry elite of Hunan conspired to eliminate Jiao because of the threat that he and his followers posed to the established social order. Tan had expected to gain control of the province following the Wuchang uprising, and had been continually manipulating events so as to instigate Jiao’s death and ensure his own subsequent elevation to the position of Hunan governor. Witnesses like Zhong Boyi (aka Zhong Caihong, 1880-1961), another member of the elite who would go on to be the director of the provincial finance bureau under Tan, contend that Mei must have at least had tacit consent from Tan before

⁵ Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 155.

⁶ Esherick, *Reform and Revolution*, 204.

⁷ Esherick, *Reform and Revolution*, 210.

arranging Jiao's assassination.⁸ In Esherick's analysis, Tan led elite interests to thwart the threat to their social standing that Jiao and the revolution embodied. He and the local gentry wanted reform and change, but only if they were the ones controlling the pace of progress. In this interpretation, Jiao's murder was a tragedy for Hunan and China, as the elite classes used the rhetoric of revolution to commit a coup against the Qing court, and assert their political authority. The promise of substantial change that Jiao Dafeng's rule represented was supplanted by the elite government of Tan Yankai. Provisionally, in 1911, it appeared as though the revolution had been defeated by the late Qing elites, who preserved their power by disguising under the label of reform.⁹

Yet there are indications that the true cause of Jiao's downfall was his lack of experience in matters of administration, which attracted ire from among the professional soldiers who comprised the core of the Hunan New Army like Mei Xing. As Zhao Hengti recounts in his oral history, Jiao's attempt to enlarge the provincial military would have made payroll untenable, and produced a high degree of chaos and disorder. He writes, "[Jiao] did his best to recruit soldiers and enrich his strength. Consequently, the army became extremely disorganized, with the regular forces being reorganized into six divisions."¹⁰ Though Tao Juyin's history of the era disagrees with this last figure, claiming that it was not six but five divisions, he concurs that the proposed expansion of the military was extreme in both speed and number, with Jiao attempting to increase the army by 50,000 soldiers.¹¹ Tan's biographical chronicle makes the same point; the entry for the month of Jiao's rise and fall points out that Jiao had tried to send extremely high levels of material support for the Wuchang uprising, which would necessarily have exacerbated tensions in a provincial government already concerned about military expenditures. After Jiao's death, Tan Yankai was unable to renege on the promised salaries for the soldiers, and the 1912 Hunan budget for this item surpassed 8.5 million yuan. Given that the entire provincial budget for 1911 did not exceed this figure, it is clear that military expenses were spiraling out of control. In other words, it was not necessary for Tan and his peers to conspire in the creation of an environment that would have led to Jiao's death; Jiao himself made those conditions possible.

Edward McCord offers an alternative perspective on the subject of Tan's complicity, and the significance of Jiao's murder for the forces of local reform and revolution. Tan did not punish Mei and his soldiers for their culpability in the assassination, apparently signaling support for the murder, yet Tan was apparently surprised when initially told what had happened.¹² Perhaps some miscommunication occurred between Mei and Tan, which led to Jiao's death, or possibly Tan was merely reluctant to initiate a cycle of retribution in an unstable political environment.

⁸ Zhong, *Interviews*, 24. Original: 事先或嘗獲組菴之默許。

⁹ Minoru Shimizu also supports this line of characterization of Jiao's death as a elite-led coup. See his "The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and the Popular Movement," in Eto Shinkichi and Harold Z. Schiffrin, *The 1911 Revolution in China: Interpretive Essays* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984), 193-208.

¹⁰ Zhong, *Interviews*, 24. Original: 儘量募兵，擴充實力，故部隊龐雜已極，即正規軍亦編下六師之衆。

¹¹ Tao Juyin, *Anecdotes*, 101. Original: 這些功臣自居，驕傲自滿的將軍們都不把焦都督放在眼下。

¹² Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 95.

Whatever the case might be, Tan, as Hunan governor-general, would publish a statement at the end of November in *Shibao* that praised Jiao's contributions to the revolution and mourned his death.¹³ One year later, he ordered the construction of a bronze statue to commemorate Jiao's martyrdom.¹⁴ As McCord speculates, these probably were efforts to placate Jiao's non-elite comrades who remained upset at both his death as well as the return to a local politics dominated by the same class of late Qing elites. It took the prestige of Huang Xing, who had viewed these events in his home province of Hunan from afar, to intervene and tamp down ill-will against Tan by naming him head of the provincial branch of the KMT. This established Tan's revolutionary credentials while also enhancing support for the party. These immediate motives were fused with repaid favors and reciprocal action as well: Huang had been a teacher at the Mingde Academy during the period of Tan's financial support for that institution, and had benefited from Tan's intervention during his 1905 flight to Japan. The debt incurred then was returned six years later when Huang supported Tan in a time of need.¹⁵

Tan's subsequent tenure as provincial governor lasted only two years, and has been criticized for doing nothing to respond to the drives that motivated the 1911 Revolution. In this, it seemed no different from the other elite-controlled provincial administrations that dominated local governance after the fall of the Qing state. Esherick notes, "[t]he trend of rising prices and taxes which accompanied the Qing reforms continued unabated under the liberal regimes of the early Republic. The peasantry, for its part, gained nothing from the revolution but a new regime in which gentry and officials were allied even more closely in defense of the class interests of the elite."¹⁶ Provinces like Hunan and governors like Tan, in other words, were merely enriching themselves through industrial projects, carrying on their predecessors' tradition of peasant exploitation.

Previously underused archival materials, however, suggest a more complex story. Nearly all the oral histories of non-elites who experienced this 1911 transition were taken after the 1949 Communist victory, and thus have a predisposition towards a historiographical view of elites as being selfish and greedy. As such, arguments that are based on such materials, like Esherick's, necessarily share the same perspective, critical of post-1911 local governance for being both useless to the masses as well as interested only in strengthening their own power. When contemporaneous materials are consulted, the supposed fumbling and malicious behavior of elites like Tan becomes far more ambiguous. Orders concerning the establishment and standardization of the postal service, for example, suggest an exacting attention to mundane detail and proper bureaucratic procedure. Example policies issued in 1912 include making sure dates were recorded according to the solar calendar rather than the lunar,¹⁷

¹³ Tan Yankai 譚延闓, "悼焦、陈二督布告" [Notice of Mourning for Officials Jiao and Chen] in *Shibao*, November 28, 1911, as found in Zhou, ed., *Works*, 9. Original: 首倡义旗, 厥功甚伟, 悼惜殊深

¹⁴ Tan Yankai 譚延闓, "为焦达峰、陈作新铸铜像令" [Directive for a Bronze Statue of Jiao Dafeng and Chen Zuoxin] in *Shenbao*, September 1, 1912, as found in Zhou, ed., *Works*, 18. Original: 秉旋乾转坤之才, 建耀日回天之烈, 充宜铸金以祀, 志纪念而长存.

¹⁵ McCord, *Power of the Gun*, 96-101.

¹⁶ Esherick, *Reform and Revolution*, 252

¹⁷ "为传谕事陽曆千九百四年正月七日安奉" [Instructions on Using the Solar Calendar] (Order # 14, July 12, 1912) File 90-1-497, page 27, Hunan Provincial Archives, Changsha, Hunan, People's Republic of China.

instruction on how offices should treat foreign requests to exchange currency,¹⁸ and admonishments concerning the irregular size of official correspondence.¹⁹ These regulations might not be as exciting or impactful as some of the radical proposals put forward by more revolutionary regimes, but, as David Henkin has shown for the nineteenth-century United States postal service, communications networks were crucial for binding together both state and society, and thus, facilitate revolutionary change.²⁰ Moreover, while there are certainly ways in which regimes might be able to use an institution like a postal service to enhance its own power, surely there are benefits as well that should not be overlooked.

In any event, the political position of Tan Yankai as the new provincial governor after 1911 illustrates the ambiguous relationship between what Li Jiannong would later categorize as opposing reformist and revolutionary factions. As a member of the late Qing elite who pushed for constitutional monarchy prior to the revolution, he embodied the established order that the revolutionaries wanted to overthrow. During the brief administration of Jiao Dafeng, Tan was not a part of the revolutionary movement and had arguably become its chief obstacle, yet he was given a high position in the local branch of the KMT soon after. To be sure, there were divisions between the two movements, but Tan's attempt to join the two together suggests that the boundary was porous, in contrast to how the Li Jiannong-influenced historiography would later depict. Indeed, a radical in one era might be a moderate in the next, suggesting the meaninglessness of the definition.

Revolution and Reform after 1911 in Li Jiannong's *Political History*

The ambiguity and contentious relationship between reformers and revolutionaries in Hunan were mirrored at the national level. The two loosely-defined groups had worked in concert against the Qing, but, since the success of the 1911 revolution, were now rivals for power. Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei (1858-1927) are usually interpreted as quintessential examples of the reformers for their willingness to work with the Qing Court during the failed 1898 reforms and their subsequent advocacy for constitutional monarchy in the years after. Liang and Kang stand in sharp contrast to Huang Xing and Sun Yatsen, who continually pushed for the overthrow of the dynasty, and who are often portrayed as the primary contributors to the success of that effort.²¹

Yet these categories are problematic. On a political level, these were labels that were attached to rivals in pejorative ways: reformers were attacked for their collaborationist tendencies, while revolutionaries were critiqued for unrealistic ambitions. Even when both groups were in Japan as exiles because of their anti-Qing organizing, they competed with each

¹⁸ “為傳諭事照得各支局於匯票即對據上所粘郵票多有不甚留意待收洋人優到特票” [Instructions to each suboffice concerning money orders, postage, and Westerners] (Order #29, September 4, 1912) File 90-1-497, page 35, Hunan Provincial Archives, Changsha, Hunan, People's Republic of China.

¹⁹ “為傳諭事照得本分界各分局暨二等支局來往公函向來大小不一無一正式殊非辦公之道死為劃一辦公” [Instructions concerning the uniform size of official documents] (Order #30, September 9, 1912). File 90-1-497, page 37, Hunan Provincial Archives, Changsha, Hunan, People's Republic of China.

²⁰ David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

²¹ For a modern example of this categorization, see Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 7.

other for financing and attention. This competition did not end after the 1911 Revolution, as the two groups coalesced into two factions: the revolutionaries into the KMT, or Nationalist Party associated with Sun, Huang, and Song, and the reformers into what would later become known as the Progressive Party associated with Liang.

This political rivalry informs how the two groups are historically depicted, as demonstrated in Li Jiannong's influential overview of the late Qing and early republic. As discussed in the previous chapter, Li had been a member of the Revolutionary Alliance and worked with the anti-Qing forces in the aftermath of the Wuchang uprising to portray their struggle in the most heroic light possible. While he was still a journalist in the Wuchang area in 1912, by 1930 he had become a professor of history, in which capacity he gave a number of lectures on the politics of the prior thirty years. These lectures were eventually collected into a monograph, *Chinese Political History in the Past Thirty Years* (最近三十年中国政治史) covering the period from the 1898 reforms to the 1928 Northern Expedition.²² In 1948, this text was expanded and republished as *Political History of China in the Past Century* (中国近百年政治史). This second version of the text was translated into English in 1956, where it became a foundational text for the study of modern Chinese history in the West.²³ Li's paradigm, in which the interplay between revolutionaries and reformers provides the driving mechanism behind the development of modern Chinese politics during the period in question, and in which the former are the heroes and the latter are but impediments to progress, remains influential to this day. One Western scholar summarized its importance as follows: "[the] book was regarded as a standard work by Chinese and looked upon by others as *the* [emphasis his] political history of the period in question."²⁴

The introduction and the first three chapters of *Political History*, covering Qing rule in the nineteenth century until the Sino Japanese War of 1894-1895, are worth reviewing in order to grasp how Li interprets the underlying reasons for the imperial system's collapse in 1911, and how those factors shape his conceptualization of reform and revolution. In these chapters, a number of comparisons are made between the late Qing and early Republican eras within the broader sweep of Chinese history. Chinese antiquity is commonly remembered as a golden age that was followed by the "Warring States" period, wherein a number of different kingdoms vied for power before imperial unification in 221 BC. According to Peter Zarrow, as they focused on the importance of national unification in the early twentieth century, historians increasingly categorized Chinese history in terms of the periods before, during, and after imperial unification.²⁵ After imperial unification, the same pattern of dynastic rise and fall repeated itself throughout Chinese imperial history: smaller kingdoms fought with each other for hegemony before eventually being unified through military force. In the same way, the post-1911 period

²² Li Jiannong, *Zuijin Sanshi Nian Zhongguo Zhengzhi Shi* [Most recent thirty years of Chinese political history] (Shanghai: Taiping Yang Shudian, 1930).

²³ Li Ch'ien-nung [Li Jiannong], *The Political History of China, 1840-1928*, Trans. Teng Ssu-yu [Deng Siyu] and Jeremy Ingalls. (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand Co., 1956). All references to *Political History* will be from the Teng and Ingalls translation unless otherwise noted.

²⁴ Norbert Meinenberger, *The Emergence of Constitutional Government in China, 1905-1908: The Concept sanctioned by Empress Dowager Tz'u-Hsi* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1980), 65.

²⁵ Peter Zarrow, *Educating China: Knowledge, Society and Textbooks in a Modernizing World, 1902-1937* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 53.

of warlord division was often seen as temporary. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a work of historical fiction that describes the post-Han period of division and reunification, speaks to this sentiment in its famous epigraph: “The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has always been.”²⁶ Li alludes to this cyclical conception of Chinese history in his *Political History*, explicitly referring to the Mencian phrase “period of order, period of chaos.”²⁷ Indeed, he noted that dynasties had a tendency to rule for two or three hundred years before disintegrating into chaos, implying that the 268 year tenure of the Qing fit nicely within this model. Yet while Chinese historians had traditionally described the causes of dynastic decline in terms of the mandate of heaven or state corruption, Li argues that a conservative and backwards cultural orientation promoted an inward-looking culture wherein scientific and technological achievements beyond China’s borders were insufficiently appreciated.

In his short introduction to Qing China prior to the mid-nineteenth century, Li describes a stagnant and fundamentally unchanging political and social system which was in dire need of radical revolution by the time of the Opium War, and that directly led to the collapse of the imperial system. His ending analysis of the nationwide reaction to the Opium War is emblematic of his critical attitude towards the actions of both state and society following this event. For him, even after the war’s end in 1842,

... the Chinese still maintained that China was the source of civilization for the whole world, that the Western barbarians had no culture worth regarding, and the power of Western guns was not a consequence of Western science. They took the recent defeat by the barbarians as merely an accident such as China had weathered many times in her long history.²⁸

The general tone that Li takes towards the Chinese reaction to defeat is one of indignant incredulity: what could justify such faith in their own culture? Why do they have such hostility towards progressive change? How could their rout at the hands of the British be so willfully ignored? For him, this blindness on the part of the Chinese towards their own lack of knowledge represents a key factor behind the fall of the Qing.

Perhaps the more pressing question was: how can this attitude be changed? According to Li Jiannong, only a sweeping revolution would be able to eradicate the vestiges of traditional Chinese culture and the state. This is first suggested by his description of the dramatic political, social, and cultural transformations represented by the pseudo-Christian Taiping state, which lasted 11 years and stalemated the military of the central government before being defeated by the Hunan Army of Zeng Guofan. Yet, despite the radical social change that their regime enacted, Li criticizes the Taiping state for being insufficiently revolutionary, signaling his own attitude towards change:

In form the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace seemed to carry out a total revolution against Chinese religion, politics, and economics. But this revolution actually was not in accord with modern revolutionary spirit. The Taipings tried to

²⁶ Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, trans. Moss Roberts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5. Original: 天下大勢，分久必合，合久必分。

²⁷ Li Jiannong, *Political History*, 47. Original: 一治一亂。

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

put new wine in an old bottle; the flavor of the new was soon soured by the old. The Taipings were soon permeated with old Chinese corruptions—nepotism and debauchery—and the old Chinese habit of conservatism and fixed ideas.²⁹

From this critique, we can begin to get a sense for Li's fervent desire for revolution and transformation, unsurprising for a member of the Revolutionary Alliance. In his assessment, the Taiping Rebellion failed not because they were too radical for Chinese society, but because they were not radical enough. Had they been less moored to Chinese culture—and more aligned with a vaguely defined 'modern revolutionary spirit'—then they might have been able to prevail. Instead, their defeat by Zeng Guofan and the Qing ensured that China would remain trapped within its backwards-looking attitude for decades more.

For Li, it took the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 to finally signal the end for both the traditional focus on the past as well as the imperial system itself. Attempts to graft Chinese culture with Western science had been made by both the Qing court at the center as well as regional leaders like Zhang Zhidong and Li Hongzhang, with mixed results. Though Qing China had been relatively successful in fighting the French in Vietnam, their complete rout by Japan strongly suggested the need for radical change. Yet even this resounding defeat was not enough to convince the majority that such change was necessary. In Li's words, the reforms proposed after this war were insufficient:

What was most needed in China also was a political revolution, but forward looking individuals who promoted China's adoption of Western methods were restrained by the conservatives, and the Chinese people generally had no spirit of adventure. How could they avoid failure in dealing with foreign countries? However, after the fiasco of the Sino-Japanese War, the prestige of the traditional leaders could not be maintained any longer. A political revolutionary force began to emerge.³⁰

Thus, with this overview of the nineteenth century, Li establishes a paradigm that will carry over into his discussion of the last years of the Qing and first years of the Chinese republic: necessary change is stymied by well-meaning reforms that only postpone the inevitable revolution. The small reforms that had been attempted after the Opium War were failures. The changes enacted by the Taiping rebels also failed because they did not go far enough. Even the traumatic defeat by Japan in 1895 only resulted in half-hearted reforms, and not revolution. The distinction is clear, and his preference is obvious: between reforms and revolutions, Li clearly believed in the power of revolution rather than the possibility of reform.

In Li's *Political History*, though reformers and revolutionaries shared the desire to improve and modernize China, they were fierce rivals first and foremost. Prior to 1911, they fought with each other for financial support from the same group of overseas Chinese and strongly disagreed with the ideology and methods of the other. For example, Liang Qichao and the reformers during the late Qing "predicted bad effects from a revolution and a republic—such as internal dissension, struggle for power among the revolutionary leaders themselves,

²⁹ Ibid., 65.

³⁰ Ibid., 143

and endless disorder,”³¹ correctly anticipating the tumult of the post-1911 era. Their enmity was matched by their counterparts, who viewed prospects for gradual reform as naïve: “[w]ithin the Constitutional Party [one name for the reformers] there were a great many people who were very enthusiastic and worked hard toward a constitutional government, yet their efforts were viewed by the revolutionists as extremely foolish.”³² Given these attitudes, it is no surprise that Li describes their relationship after the revolution as antagonistic.

Yet to what degree is this text a politically informed critique of the reformers instead of the objective description of events that it purports to be? For Li, the reformers during the early republic were just as spineless and fawning as they were in the late Qing: too timid to engage not only with the political and intellectual changes needed to modernize the nation, but also with the obstacles to the work of substantive revolution. But, as demonstrated by the case of Tan Yankai, the division between the two categories is not as clear-cut as he might have his readers believe. Indeed, the differences between the two parties can be thought of as a disagreement about tactics and methods rather than goals, as both factions wanted a modern, strong, and unified state that could preserve peace, economically thrive, and defend its territory from the depredations of foreign imperialists. Given these shared goals, what could explain Li’s venom for the reformers, aside from his self-identification with the revolutionaries? Surely the response of the reformers to the 1913 assassination of the revolutionary leader Song Jiaoren contributed to a KMT narrative of betrayal.

The Assassination of Song Jiaoren and the Second Revolution

Song Jiaoren’s violent death in March 1913 marked the end of a precarious peace that had existed between the various political factions, and signaled the beginning of the end for the viability of the reform platform. Up to that point, the majority of the political maneuvering between these groups had been rhetorical; afterwards, a violent conflict commonly called “The Second Revolution” erupted that resulted in a complete victory for Yuan and the near destruction of the Nationalist Party. The Reform Parties, which only formally amalgamated into the Progressive Party (進步黨) in May of 1913, largely supported Yuan against the Nationalists, thus paving the way for his imperial ambitions. The cause of reform, as opposed to revolution, was thus sullied further for being associated with the late Qing reformer Yuan as well as the political parties of the early republic which supported him against the Nationalist Party. In Hunan, Tan and Zhao joined in the fight against Yuan, and were imprisoned for their efforts. Li Jiannong, who never left the Nationalist Party and had written newspaper articles warning against Yuan’s ambitions, followed the example of Sun Yatsen and Huang Xing, leaving the country for overseas study.

After the 1911 Revolution, Yuan became Provisional President of the new Republic of China, and his record during this period was comprised of both progressive modernization reforms as well as measures to preserve his own military strength. Upon taking office, he pledged to step down in favor of a president chosen by the congress that was scheduled to be formally elected within the year. He also promoted policies like Western education, anti-opium campaigns, and a new civil service examination that built upon the reputation he had achieved

³¹ Ibid., 206.

³² Ibid., 217.

during the late Qing as a modernizer and reformer, and won the support of those in the reform faction, who were most naturally predisposed to favor such measures. Yet he also pushed through a program of demobilizing the hundreds of thousands of soldiers that had joined the fight in against the Qing, primarily based in the south, where his influence was weakest. This disbandment, when paired with his borrowing 25 million pounds from foreign banks at high interest rates to fund his own troops, provoked no small amount of suspicion concerning his possible ambitions to convert the republic back into an empire, with himself at the head. These suspicions would eventually be proven correct, as this financing was crucial to his success in the civil war to come. The juxtaposition of these two types of policies caused his reform efforts, as well as the alliances he forged to implement them, to be viewed with great suspicion and cynicism by his political opponents. After the death of Song Jiaoren and the near elimination of the Nationalist Party, this suspicion has spread to the histories of the time as well.³³

As a major figure in the Nationalist Party, Song Jiaoren had become the leader of the anti-Yuan opposition by the end of 1912; his assassination the next year would galvanize the anti-Yuan movement. Elections for the national legislature were mandated by the provisional constitution for the beginning of 1913, and Song proved to be a tireless campaigner, passionately telling crowds that their votes for his party were necessary to circumscribe the danger posed by Yuan. On March 20, he was shot in the Shanghai railway station by secret society members who were associated with Yuan's subordinates. Song died two days later, and Yuan was never explicitly connected to his death, though the killer was closely connected to one of his chief subordinates and never punished. Regardless, the Nationalist Party led a military uprising against his rule in retaliation but, because of Yuan's military superiority and the support that he received from Liang Qichao and the reformers, the Nationalists were defeated within months, and virtually destroyed as a political party. Integrity and martyrdom were now associated with revolution and the Nationalist Party; collaboration and opportunism linked with reform and the Constitutionalists.³⁴

In Hunan, Tan Yankai joined the Nationalists in their opposition to Yuan, but in a lukewarm way, encapsulating the awkward position as a member of both the reformer and the revolutionary factions. Perhaps more importantly, the military forces that could have been used to support the Second Revolution and resist Yuan had been disbanded. Zhao Hengti had brought his Guangxi troops to Changsha in the beginning of 1912 to supervise the disarmament process, and his success was nearly total. This policy was necessary to preserve provincial finances, but, as Zhao would later note, disarmament had the inadvertent effect of eliminating Hunan's ability to defend itself from invasion to the north.³⁵ Consequently, Zhao's small unit was overwhelmed at Yuezhou, where Hunan meets Hubei, and he was captured by Yuan's forces and sent to Beijing as a prisoner for execution. It was only due to the intervention of his former classmates from the Japanese Officers Academy that Zhao was able to survive the

³³ Shan, *Yuan Shikai*, 165-186.

³⁴ For more on this episode, see Liew, *Struggle for Democracy*, 191-201; or see Shan, *Yuan Shikai*, for a very generous interpretation of Yuan's actions.

³⁵ Zhao, "Interview," 53. Original: 然亦因此於二次革命之役，湖南無多正式武力可供北伐之用。 McCord, *Power of the Gun*, 150, estimates that the number of troops remaining in Hunan at the beginning of 1913 was probably 11,000 men.

ordeal. As leader of a rebellious province, Tan Yankai would soon join him there, where they would both stay under house arrest before being granted amnesty in 1915.

Li Jiannong and Tao Juyin, though much less important figures, were also affected by the political changes of the Second Revolution. In contrast to the halfhearted opposition of Tan and Zhao, Li's distaste for Yuan was never in doubt, and so he was in a much more dangerous situation. In June 1913, his newspaper, the Wuchang-based *Republican Daily* (民国日报) was forced to shut down by the government, and four of his fellow editors were arrested. His was not the only periodical affected, as Yuan's regime censored all publications that critiqued his rule. Ironically, the silencing of journalists like Li presented an opportunity for 15-year-old Tao Juyin. Tao had worked for *Women's Rights Daily* (女权日报) in Changsha from after 1911 until, like *Republican Daily*, Yuan's government forced it to close because of the radical positions taken by its publisher: the radical feminist, one-time Revolutionary Alliance member, and friend to her fellow Hunanese Song Jiaoren, Tang Qunying (1871-1937). Because so many local publications like *Women's Rights Daily* and *Republican Daily* had been censored, national-level publications saw an opportunity to expand into new markets. *Shibao* was among those that capitalized on the opportunity, and hired Tao to write for its short-lived monthly magazine supplement, *Excess Excitement* (餘興), which would give the young journalist a broader, national-level platform. It was no coincidence that Tao advanced to his new role just as Li departed his: this pair represents the transition between two generations of intellectuals, with different perspectives on revolution. In historian Timothy Cheek's words, reform as a specific "ideological moment" may have been coming to a close in favor of revolution.³⁶

Despite the differences of the historical moment, Li continued to employ the same strategies for survival and advancement. Meanwhile, just as Li had escaped the Qing in 1910 by fleeing to Tokyo to study political economy, he pursued the same course of action in escaping Yuan in 1914. This time, however, he went to England, where he audited classes in political theory at the London School of Economics for three years. Given the ferocity with which Yuan persecuted his political opponents, Li was worried about his personal safety, and thus did not return to China until 1917, after Yuan had died. It was while in England that his interest in federalism and constitutionalism began. Federalism would not be a viable political option for the new republic so long as Yuan Shikai and his desire to centralize political authority remained, but constitutionalism was, ironically, about to experience the near apex and nadir of its importance in China for the 20th century.³⁷

National Constitutions, Frank Goodnow, and Failure

The historical foundations of Chinese constitutionalism predate Li's 1913 interest by decades. One aspect of the Qing New Reforms was a proposal to convert the imperial system into a constitutional monarchy, in clear emulation of Meiji Japan, whose promulgation of a constitution was perceived to be a key factor in its modernization. There was, however, ambiguity concerning what this political theory would actually look like in practice: did it mean

³⁶ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 7.

³⁷ Hua Chu, "Li Jiannong"; Tao Juyin, *Memoirs*, 21-22. For more on Tang Qunying, see Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China*. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 75 and Strand, *Unfinished Republic*, 143.

a state that was rigidly governed by laws? Some sort of democracy in which the people could participate in their rule? A more decentralized nation-state wherein local polities had more autonomy? Japan's Meiji state seemed to include all of these aspects, but how should this system be translated and implemented for Qing China? Or for the new Republic? It seemed as though every prominent scholar had a different set of answers to these questions, creating a lively intellectual climate, but little consensus emerged.

Regardless of what the substance of constitutionalism might have been, it was desired by the late Qing reformers because of how it had clearly helped Japan, which was perceived to be the only East Asian nation to successfully resist Western colonialism through the construction of a rich economy and strong state. This perception was only strengthened by the Japanese total victory over China in the 1894-95 war, and then by Japan's unexpected defeat of Russia ten years later. This latter conflict was especially surprising because this was understood to be the first time an Asian state had triumphed over a Western one. This victory was attributed to the more modern character of Japan's state compared to Russia's premodern despotism. As one historian notes,

Many Chinese related this development [Russia's defeat] to the polity of the two countries concerned. After the promulgation of the constitution in 1889 and with the convening of the Diet in 1890, Japan was a constitutional monarchy. In contrast to the other leading powers, Russia had neither a constitution nor a parliament. From this state of affairs the Chinese concluded: Russia lost the war *because* she was ruled in an autocratic manner; Japan was victorious *because* she had adopted constitutional government.³⁸

In other words, Japan's victory was less due to military tactics or courage on the field of battle, but more because of their adoption of constitutionalism.

According to Chinese observers, the key aspect of Meiji-inspired constitutionalism was its ability to enable the state to respond to the needs of its people. Other features were important, like the rule of law that prevented the excesses of a tyrant, but the ability of the government to engender loyalty among its people and unity between state and society was perceived to be paramount. The mechanism by which this would be accomplished was a parliament, or national assembly, which a modern constitution would construct and empower.³⁹ However, as the subjects of the Qing empire were seen by their state as insufficiently educated and civilized, provincial assemblies in 1908 were permitted as the first step towards preparing the way for an appropriately cultured citizenry to eventually join the elite in directing their nation. The Provincial Assembly in Hunan that Tan Yankai led during the last years of the dynasty is thus one example of how constitutionalism was interpreted and implemented.⁴⁰

Moreover, the lack of any explicit revolution in Japan clearly appealed to those elements in and out of government who were more disposed towards modernization through gradual

³⁸ Meienberger, *The Emergence of Constitutional Government in China*, 22-23.

³⁹ For more on the connection between assemblies and constitutionalism, see Meienberger, *The Emergence of Constitutional Government in China*, 36.

⁴⁰ For more on late Qing provincial assemblies, see Roger R. Thompson, *China's Local Councils in the Age of Constitutional Reform, 1898-1911* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1995).

reform as opposed to radical change. The Qing Court could easily point to constitutionalism as proof of their willingness to adjust to new modern realities. If Meiji Japan had taken nine years to promulgate their constitution, should not the Qing state, which governed a far larger and more heterogeneous polity, be given at least that much time, if not more? Yet to avoid accusations of procrastination, the Qing Court decreed in 1906 that it would become a constitutional monarchy within nine years.

The connection between constitutionalism with modernity, rule of law, and representative government that was forged during the late Qing had consequences for the early years of the Chinese republic. The 1912 provisional constitution that formed the basis for the new state echoed many of the same features as those drafts and featured the mandate, as mentioned previously, that elections for the National Assembly should be held within ten months.⁴¹ Even after Song's death and the near-destruction of the Nationalist Party, the National Assembly continued to exist, albeit mainly as an organization populated by those of the Reform Party who approved of nearly all of Yuan's policies. The importance of constitutionalism continued as well, as demonstrated by the May 1913 arrival of the American legal scholar Frank Goodnow (1859-1939) in Beijing, to assist in the development of a new constitution.

Goodnow was the leader in his field of comparative constitutional studies, and radiated confidence throughout his year-long sojourn that he would be able to guide the Chinese people towards legal modernity. An advocate for understanding the law without recourse to morality, he believed in the capacity of his field to dispassionately and scientifically effect positive change. Based on his credentials as a professor of political science at Columbia University and the first president of the American Political Science Association, as well as his academic specialization in the subject, he was sent by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to China to assist the young republic in drafting its first long-term constitution. His first impression of Yuan Shikai was extremely positive, and he enthusiastically endorsed him as someone who, as he wrote to Columbia President Nicholas Butler (1862-1947), "struck me as a man of great force and withal quite genial and kindly."⁴² In public, Goodnow expressed a deep optimism about the new constitution, and what it could do for China.

In private, however, Goodnow expressed deep pessimism about the ability of the Chinese people to practice fidelity to the law. In another letter to Butler, he wrote, "as I look at it these Chinese have hardly the faintest idea of what a constitution is. They do not, I think, even know what law is."⁴³ Coming from a scholar tasked to develop a constitution in China, these are harsh comments. This is not to suggest that his evaluation is accurate: there are clearly laws in China in 1913, and certainly laws for the centuries prior as well. Rather, this shows the degree to which Goodnow believed he had failed in persuading his interlocutors to adopt his specific conception of what a legal system should be.

⁴¹ See "The Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China," *The American Journal of International Law* 6, no. 3, Supplement: Official Documents (Jul. 1912): 149-154; Article 53 concerns itself with this deadline for electing a new congress.

⁴² Jedidiah Kroncke, "An Early Tragedy of Comparative Constitutionalism: Frank Goodnow and the Chinese Republic," *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 21, No. 3 (2012), 533-590, 570, quoting Goodnow's letter to Butler of May 18, 1913.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 560, quoting Goodnow's letter to Butler of June 26, 1913.

By the end of the year, he would accept an offer to become president of Johns Hopkins University, cutting short his planned three-year stay in China. While it is easy to see how Goodnow prematurely ended his time as advisor to Yuan in order to assume the position of university president, it is also clear that his frustration with his lack of progress played a significant role in his decision to leave China. Just before his departure, he wrote another letter to Butler, still complaining about the Chinese unwillingness to conform their understanding of the law to his own: “[they] will not live up to any constitution they adopted. It is not in them. They have no conception of the rule of law. They have no courts worthy of the name.”⁴⁴ The questionable accuracy of his evaluation is in large part due to Goodnow’s valorization of his own (American) version of the law, and his corresponding inability to appreciate alternative models. In this, he exemplifies the long tradition of Western legal scholars to contrast their own ‘civilized’ institutions with the perceived lack of those same systems in places like China. Teemu Ruskola summarizes this phenomenon well:

[T]here is indeed a strong cultural tendency to associate the United States with law (even if excessively so at times), and a corresponding historic tendency to associate China with an absence of law (whether that absence be considered a vice or a virtue). The distinction is crucial because the emergence of law, in the sense of rule-of-law, is one of the signal markers of modernity.⁴⁵

In other words, the lack of “Western-style” laws in China meant that Western scholars like Goodnow would think that there were no laws at all.

It is unclear how much contact Goodnow had with Chinese scholars on these topics, or with whom he was speaking; he is not thought to have been able to understand Chinese, and he rarely left the city of Beijing throughout his time in China. Even after accounting for this, the rhetorical exaggeration inherent in his letter, and the fact that that Goodnow’s inability to understand Chinese meant that he had little chance of grasping what Chinese conceptions of the law even were, these are scathing and unfair critiques. His bitter tone is all the more surprising given his success in convincing Yuan to adopt a constitution that reflected many of his suggestions.⁴⁶

Stepping back to reconsider the larger context, it should perhaps come as no surprise that many of the Chinese with whom he interacted had a cynical view of the law and constitutions, given the violence and repression of 1913 that had followed Song Jiaoren’s assassination. It is unclear how aware Goodnow, who arrived in China barely one month after Song’s death, was regarding the political atmosphere but, based on his support for Yuan’s ill-fated attempt to become emperor in 1915, it would seem as though he did not have an accurate sense of public sentiment during this time. Given Yuan’s draconian repression of his political opponents and the historical link between constitutions and political representation of the public, resistance to Goodnow’s ideas is wholly understandable.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 564, quoting Goodnow’s letter to Butler of May 18, 1914.

⁴⁵ Teemu Ruskola, *Legal Orientalism: China, the United States, and Modern Law* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2013) 6.

⁴⁶ The text of that 1914 constitution can be found in *The Constitutional Compact of the Chung Hua Min Kuo*, trans. Sao-ke Alfred Sze and T.Y. Lo, ed. and rev. Frank J. Goodnow and N. Ariga (Peking: n.p., 1914).

That resistance would have been compounded even further following the debacle of 1916, when Yuan attempted to declare himself emperor, failed, and died. This validation of all the revolutionary suspicions firmly ended the viability of gradual reform in China at the national level after 1916, as the concept was inextricably associated with the traitor who betrayed the republican cause. Yuan's cause of death is largely unknown, but it is largely held that his disappointment with his formerly loyal subordinates, from whom he expected unflinching support, was a key factor. Goodnow would go on to write an infamous memo that defended the would-be emperor in the Western press, claiming that China was ill-prepared for representative democracy, and that an enlightened autocrat such as Yuan was necessary to preserve public order.⁴⁷

Yuan's death in June 1916 was not the only one of note that year: the Hunanese Huang Xing and Cai E, who had fought for the revolutionary cause in opposition to the Qing and then Yuan, also passed away. Huang had gone into exile in the United States following the death of Song Jiaoren, where he raised funds for Anti-Yuan military forces. He only returned in July following Yuan's death, but soon passed away in October, of illness.⁴⁸ Cai was one of the leaders of the anti-Yuan movement, and his staunch opposition to Yuan's imperial venture was one of the key factors in his defeat. He died in November, in a Japanese hospital, of tuberculosis. Both Cai and Huang were accorded state funerals in Changsha, as heroes of the nation.⁴⁹

The governor of Hunan who presided over those funerals was Tan Yankai, who had reclaimed the position after Yuan's death. Following his arrest and imprisonment in 1913, Tan had been pardoned, and fled to Shanghai. Zhao Hengti was still under house arrest in Beijing until 1915 because of his connection to his former superior, Cai E, and the anti-Yuan movement. After escaping Beijing, he was able to link up with Tan and sneak back into Hunan, where they persuaded Tan's successor as governor, Tang Xiangming (1885-1975), to join their side. This was a surprise to many, as Tang had been widely critiqued for his brutal administration, and execution of many gentry who had been loyal to Tan. Moreover, Tang had been a trusted subordinate of Yuan, so when his Hunan declared independence from Yuan's central government in May, it was a shock. According to Zhao, this betrayal directly contributed to Yuan's early death not one month later.⁵⁰

Conclusion

1916 marked the deaths of three political titans of the early Chinese republic; this year also marked the end of the reform movement as a viable alternative to revolution, in both practice and history. Their prestige was tainted by their support for Yuan, making it unrealistic for other political factions to join with them, and they would be remembered thereafter for their lack of integrity. Moreover, Yuan's association with constitutionalism, and subsequent

⁴⁷ Kronicke, "An Early Tragedy," 564-9.

⁴⁸ Hsueh, *Huang Hsing*, 183-4.

⁴⁹ Platt, *Provincial Patriots*, 171; Shuk-wah Poon, "國葬：民國初年的政治角力與國家死亡儀式的建構," in 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 [Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica], No. 83 (Mar. 2014), 47-87.

⁵⁰ Zhao, "Interview," 54. Original: 袁氏終以憤死

revision to Chinese imperial traditions, only made attempts at reform even more politically toxic. The effort begun in the late Qing to create a constitutional basis for China's new polity was thus fatally wounded; in condemning Yuan, contemporaries and later historians dismissed the possibility of constitutional reform. His actions also eventually pushed Sun Yatsen to embrace military power and a Soviet-informed, Leninist-style restructuring of the party along decidedly less democratic lines.

This chapter has traced the background of this anti-reformist and pro-revolutionary mythos in Chinese historiography in order to show how those tarred with the reformist label, like Tan Yankai, are quickly dismissed as sincerely wanting to develop their polities. Li Jiannong's influential *Political History* has created a paradigm of reform against revolution with which historians are still grappling, and that has informed our neglect of provincial governance or Chinese constitutionalism. Yet remaining within this paradigm locks us into a teleological framework wherein revolution was the only option for modernizing China. The 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny constitutes one more example of the reformist inability to appeal to the masses, and the necessity for revolution.

The next chapter explores another aspect of this teleology, in which the chaos of high warlordism after 1916 makes revolution seem all the more attractive. Yet just as this chapter has suggested the possibilities of constitutionalism and provincial governance as a counter to the dominant paradigm, the next will use federalism and inter-bureaucratic communication in the same way.

Chapter 3: Warlordism, Federalism, and Sensational Narratives

Introduction

When the period after 1916 is compared to the years prior, it is usually described as the apex of modern Chinese warlordism, in which factions would seemingly coalesce and split apart on a daily basis, and the attendant violent conflict was uniformly endemic. The mutiny of 1920 matches this narrative perfectly, while also building upon themes of betrayal at the national (Song Jiaoren) and local (Jiao Dafeng) levels. While not contesting the undeniably high degree of political turmoil during his period, this chapter still challenges this conventional narrative as being overly simplified. Historical studies of the Early Republic are typically founded upon sources that are prone to sensationalistic description, and that are not often critically examined. This is exemplified by Tao Juyin's influential popular narrative of the era, which employs overdramatic dialogue seemingly taken directly from the pages of traditional historical fiction like *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to appeal to its readers. By emphasizing chaos of the era and the moral bankruptcy of his subjects, Tao implicitly claims that the coming Communist Revolution is necessary to centralize the nation in order to save it from itself.

Yet this one-sided account overlooks a number of factors. First, the continued thriving of local administrations in provinces like Hunan that is illustrated by continued bureaucratic correspondence between the center and the periphery. This chapter uses these materials to suggest the persistence of a shared belief in legal institutions like the national constitution, or, at the least, some degree of common respect for the law, however it may have been promulgated. Widespread predisposition for legal obedience is worth highlighting because it undercuts conventional narratives of the period's anarchy, and is worth reconciling with the various mutinies and betrayals of the era. Second, this chapter also analyzes substantive proposals for political transformation like federalism and provincial autonomy. The two terms, often used interchangeably during this period, represent an alternative to centralized political control. Li Jiannong, who would write *Political History* nearly a decade later, was one of the foremost advocates for federalism, and two of his 1917 essays on the topic deserve serious consideration. The 1920 Mutiny occurred in the midst of Hunan's federal movement, which only bolsters those who criticize the concept for being merely an excuse for local rulers to maintain their own power; taking the movement seriously, as a viable possibility for political reform, complicates our understanding of the mutiny, why it occurred, and its significance.

High Warlordism?

Yuan Shikai's death in 1916 was important as both a signal to the end of an era as well as the impetus motivating a rupture in relationships and alliances that only his prestige could hold together; the same should be said of the deaths of Huang Xing and Cai E in the same year. Huang and Cai were never formally head of the Chinese state in the same way as Yuan, so their importance to history has been relatively undervalued as a result. This is a mistake: Huang's record as a revolutionary leader was second to only Sun Yatsen's, and his military leadership of the anti-Qing forces during the Wuchang Uprising had made his name known all over the new Republic as a major hero. His death meant that the revolutionary alliance was deprived of a possible center of gravity who might have otherwise been able to keep the fragile alliance

unified. Without him, those of less prominent reputations began to vie with one another for power. Similarly, if not as famously, Cai E's reputation as a leader of the anti-Yuan movement during the second revolution was just as high, and he had a comparable capacity for attracting and bringing together those important Chinese military cadets who had studied together in Japan. With his passing, another power vacuum opened up, again allowing for those of more minor status to compete with one another. In other words, the deaths of these three in 1916 scrambled what was already a confusing and complicated political environment. Given the different directions that these political leaders could have pulled China toward, it was historical contingency that pushed China towards further decentralization in the decade after 1916 rather than the inescapable forces.

Perhaps due to the convoluted nature of the post-1916 period, few English-language academic works examining the political history of the early republic exist. As Edward McCord notes, "Lying between such important events as the overthrow of the imperial state in 1911 and the rise of the new revolutionary and state-building movements of the Nationalist and Communist Parties, the confusing and disorderly period of warlord rule is often ignored."¹ McCord's observation exemplifies the key problem all historians face when they research and teach this period of modern Chinese history: its lack of a simple and unified narrative, especially when compared to the periods of immediately before and after. Furthermore, this period contains high spatial diversity. For example, not only is what happened in what is now Liaoning province in the northeast different from what occurred in Guangxi province in the southwest, but the politics of the individual counties within a province could differ significantly. High temporal variance occurred as well, as the era can be characterized by the constant rise and fall of various individuals and cliques competing for power. Men who seemed to be allies in 1920 might be bitter rivals five years later, which complicates the historian's efforts to arrive at a coherent portrait of what was happening. It is far easier for a book, panel, or paper that purports to discuss a China-wide issue that stretches across decades compared to the same findings that cover events in one region that occur across the span of months.

In order to find a coherent focus, works that do cover this period of time follow the same trope: strong leaders asserting their will and exercising power through personal influence. Individuals forged armies and conquered territory based on the strength of their will and talent, with little room for morality. James Sheridan's perspective on this period is suggested by the title of his general history of the time, *China in Disintegration*, in which he writes, "a warlord decided his own policies in light of his own interests and goals."² Consequently, alliances and rivalries were not ideological but rather personal, partly explaining the persistence of conflict during this period. Edward McCord's 1993 study of militarism in Hunan also follows this assessment, claiming that there were no real causes or movements that motivated action during this time, save for the individual ambitions of the men involved. In his words, "[T]he

¹ Edward A. McCord, "Burn, Kill, Rape, and Rob: Military Atrocities, Warlordism, and Anti-Warlordism in Republican China," in *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* eds. Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001), 18-47.

² James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 58.

triumph of warlordism thus constituted not only the domination of politics by the military in general but also the personal political domination of individual military commanders.”³

Yet focusing on personal achievement and who defeated whom prevents both sophisticated analysis of the overall political culture as well as comparison to the ideologically oriented mass politics that came after, and that proved to be far more successful. By examining politics of the “warlord era” within this framework, the potential of elite-led reform like that practiced in Hunan is ignored. Political leaders are assumed to share all the same selfish motives, and have no substantive ideological agenda when compared to later groups like the KMT or CCP. The betrayals of Jiao Dafeng and Song Jiaoren, being assassinations based upon individual ambition rather than ideological disagreement, fit this narrative nicely; the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny does the same. The seeming uniformity of all of this amoral factionalism is made more prominent by the subsequent triumph of those who can portray themselves as revolutionarily distinctive.

Much of this fixation on individual achievement is due to the nature of the sources used. Studies of the period have typically depended upon three kinds of documents: the observations of foreigners, newspaper reports from that era, and memoirs written by the persons concerned. Historians’ current understanding of the time is largely informed by these three categories of sources, all of which are predisposed to favor a narrative that centers on a history made by individuals. The observations of foreigners offer historians a window into everyday life that native Chinese might consider too mundane to mention; examples of these sources include the impressions of life in Changsha from missionaries stationed there, or records from the United States consulate.⁴ Yet these temporary sojourners offer only the outsider’s perspective, wherein one warlord easily replaces another, and little insight is offered as to the underlying reasons behind these shifts in power. Periodicals, authored by professional journalists, represent a deeper examination of the best possible perspective that historians can have on public opinion. However, unlike academic works, these sorts of materials typically do not cite their sources, and it is unclear what evidence their authors used to draw their conclusions.⁵

Memoirs of the actors themselves constitute a third category of sources that have been used to analyze the early Republican era in Chinese history. Nearly all biographies of these figures, perhaps unsurprisingly, rely heavily upon the writings by those same individuals concerning their careers. The flaws in using this category of sources is readily apparent: time has a way of changing one’s memory of any one particular event, to say nothing of the manner in which people tend to retell their own stories in a way that makes them look as good as

³ Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 311.

⁴ For an example of the former source, see Alice Tisdale Hobart, *By the City of the Long Sand: A Tale of New China* (MacMillan: 1926).

⁵ Examples of the most frequently used Chinese language periodicals include *Dongfang Zazhi* 東方雜誌 [The Eastern Miscellany], *Shibao* 時報 [Eastern Times], *Chenbao* 晨報 [Morning News], and *Shenbao* 申報 [Shanghai News, also known as Shun Pao]. Examples of the most frequently used English-language periodicals include *The China Year Book*, *The North China Herald*, and *The North China Standard*.

possible.⁶ This is not to say that the many works that heavily rely on this category of sources are without merit; rather, they all have biases that skew the information presented.⁷

One genre of sources that is not commonly used in political histories of the early Chinese republic is archival material, a lacuna that only supports the conventional wisdom of anarchy by making it seem as though typical state bureaucracy did not function during this time. On one level, this is an understandable omission, as the institutions preserving these materials have frequently discouraged their use by researchers. Their policies notwithstanding, preservation and indexing efforts have been less than systematic, making it difficult to get a sense for how any single given institution might have conducted its business over time and across political rupture. Furthermore, it is difficult to get a sense for the relationship of any of this bureaucratic documentation to practice; perhaps these communiqués were merely orders from on high that were rarely obeyed. Whatever the case might be, and in spite of the difficulties in acquiring these materials, they add another dimension to the narrative that is worth integrating into our established understandings of the era. The unpublished routine directives to the various postal offices around Hunan that were discussed in the previous chapter exemplify this issue by showing how reform policies tangibly impacted the lives of local residents, thus challenging revolutionary narratives that portray an environment wherein only radical change is possible. Similarly, an unpublished 1917 petition from the Hunan Provincial Assembly to the central government challenges narratives of individual-centered action that dominate the historiography of this era, validating the truism that histories and sources in inexorably intertwined.

For these reasons, attention to sources is extremely important for studies of the “Warlord Era.” Yet, in the interests of constructing a smooth narrative, historians frequently relegate their sources to footnotes, thus obscuring their possible biases. Because the dominant narrative for this era is based on those materials like newspaper reports and autobiographical memoir that give more weight to individual action, the net effect is often to portray the politics of the time as being ethically empty and dominated by individual caprice.

Tao Juyin’s Sensational History and the Assassination of Song Jiaoren

No text exemplifies the characterization of this period as ethically empty more than Tao Juyin’s *Anecdotes of the Beiyang Warlord Domination Period*, and it is instructive to compare his description of the 1913 assassination of Song Jiaoren with that given by Li Jiannong in *Political History*. In the years following 1911, Tao was still a young journalist, continuing his work as a special correspondent in Changsha for various Shanghai-based periodicals like *Shibao*. His formal charge, at the age of 18, was to pen short news reports about local events in Hunan that were then circulated around the nation, which helped him develop a writing style that lingered on the details and drama that would attract readers.⁸ In 1957, he would draw on his

⁶ Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2014)

⁷ Examples of studies that rely on the writings or recollections of the individual featured include Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord*; Wou, *Militarism in Modern China*; Leslie H. Dingyan Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement: Regional Leadership and Nation Building in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press: 1999).

⁸ Tao, *Memoirs*, 13

experience as a witness to these events to author a highly influential eight-volume narrative of the era. Beginning with the career of Yuan Shikai as a Qing official in Korea in the late nineteenth century and ending with the 1927 establishment of the KMT state in Nanjing, Tao fills his narrative with a dizzying range of detail and character study that have made his text an indispensable guide for scholars of the period.

Anecdotes, perhaps as a function of the 1957 context in which it was published, attacks its subjects for being both stooges of foreign imperialism as well as trapped in a feudal mindset. In this, he was likely following the implicit directive of the CCP to adhere to the narrative best articulated by Fan Wenlan (1893-1969), one of the state's leading historians after 1949. As summarized by Huaiyin Li, Fan's 1946 *Modern Chinese History* [中國近代史] "emphasized the Chinese People's Revolution against imperialism and feudalism as the "main thread" in modern Chinese history."⁹ Tao, writing ten years later, must have felt pressure to ensure his text fit into this historiographical paradigm. The warlords who dominate his narrative thus become the villains against whom the masses make revolution.

Throughout *Anecdotes*, Tao wastes no opportunity to assess leading figures of the age as deserving of his readers' scorn and distaste. This is demonstrated in the first sentence of his preface: "[i]n the modern history of China, the Beiyang Warlords were a feudal military political group whose notoriety advanced the revolutionary cause. They inherited the evil sins of those who sold their nation, like Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang, and served as a shameful model for the military dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek."¹⁰ Here, Tao connects the depredations of his villains with the success of the 1949 revolution to come: backwards-looking elites like Zeng, Li, Chiang, and the warlords were all of the same kind, supporting and supported by foreign imperialism. Their unrepentant greed only accelerated the growth in popularity of the CCP, as the capitalistic exploitation of the masses became more obvious.

It is necessary to emphasize this aspect of *Anecdotes* because the combination of his text's importance as a guide to the period with Tao's 1956-influenced desire to attribute imperialistic and feudal motivations to its subjects creates a memorable narrative of these years that colors our current understandings of the period. Episodes like the 1913 assassination of Song Jiaoren at the orders of President Yuan Shikai are described in a breathless fashion that is partially understandable: Song was the national leader of a major political party, and his death both signaled and instigated a paradigm shift in the political culture of the early republic. Prior to this event, there was hope that a liberal democracy in some form might emerge from the fall of the imperial system, but Yuan's actions asserted his near-despotic authority over the state and foreshadowed his ambitions towards the resurrection of monarchical rule. Whereas the factionalism and party politics found in any republican system seemed to be a viable post-1911 alternative to the sort of leadership centered around personal networks that so many feared would replace the imperial state, Song's death marked the beginning of this model's

⁹ Huaiyin Li, "Between Tradition and Revolution: Fan Wenlan and the Origins of the Marxist Historiography of Modern China," in *Modern China*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (May 2010), 269-301, 272.

¹⁰ Tao Juyin, 北洋軍閥統治時期史話 [Anecdotes of the Beiyang Warlord Domination Period] 3 Vols. (Taiwan, INK Literary Monthly Publishing Co., Ltd. 2011; originally published 8 vols., Beijing: Shenghuo. Dushu. Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian. 1957.) Vol. 2, 15. Original: 北洋軍閥是中國近代史上繼往開來、臭名昭彰的一個封建軍事政治集團。它繼承了曾國藩、李鴻章等出賣國家和反人民的罪惡事業，又替蔣介石政權提供了軍事獨裁的可恥榜樣。

prolonged decline and the end of its viability as a possible model for China's future. The warlordism that necessarily accompanies this type of individual-centered politics. The ups and downs of the era are dramatic, making the period a perfect fit for Tao's style of history that emphasizes the villainy of its key figures.

But is this apparently perfect fit a function of the events described, or more a product of the author's desire to describe the era as highly dysfunctional as possible so as to make the years afterwards more palatable by contrast? This counterfactual question is perhaps unfair and impossible to answer substantively, but it is worth considering in light of the text's importance in shaping our perception of the period. It is also worth noting that Tao's narrative does not perfectly conform to Fan's paradigm, as the masses feature far less in *Anecdotes* than a more Marxist historian might want. Indeed, the substantive content of his narrative seems more oriented around appealing to more middlebrow tastes of his readers, rather than educating them about concepts like class struggle or imperialism. Despite its ostensibly pedagogical purpose, the text seeks to entertain his readers with tales of heroism and tragedy, offering insights into the mindset and feelings of its characters. In this, Tao draws from his background as journalist to pack his narrative with vivid details about each individual, perhaps inspired by historical fiction on past dynasties, like *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. His dramatic tone produces a version of history that, while engaging as a story, includes a high degree of speculation that veers dangerously close to embellishment and exaggeration.

While it is somewhat unfair to fault him for this style, as fidelity to historical accuracy was clearly not his aim in writing, the influence of *Anecdotes* on the historiography of the "Warlord Era" cannot be denied. His narrative remains cited to this day as an "'inside' story" of the period, implying insight and access that, though unsourced, remains valuable and reliable.¹¹ This type of history strongly favors stories that seem to hinge on interpersonal conflict and dramatic reversals of fate like the assassination of Song Jiaoren or the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny, which informs how events like these are remembered. Less sensationalistic historical factors like tax revenues, legal reforms, or technological advances were rarely, if ever, mentioned.

Tao's preference for vivid detail over mundane description was not unique to the field of journalism in Republican China. Commercially oriented newspapers, keen to attract as many readers as possible so as to sell more expensive advertisements, favored articles featuring a similar style of writing. Bryna Goodman, writing about the propensity of these publications to feature stories that were packed with lurid detail, argues that

journalists seized on sensational news, manipulating public interest in the truth-value of suicide to press particular concerns: feminist or socially conservative, political or economic... Newspapers also transformed news into fiction, with such a rapidity and with such intermingling of genres that the narrative and moral frameworks of the news and literary pages at times blurred.¹²

¹¹ This characterization of *Anecdotes* is taken from Arthur Waldron, "Review of 'China's Warlords,' by David Bonavia," in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 61, No. 2, (Apr. 1997), 387-389

¹² Bryna Goodman, "The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory, and the New Republic," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Feb. 2005), 95

In other words, the industry to which Tao belonged was clearly familiar with the sort of exaggerated level of detail that he featured in his writing. His fellow journalists often framed their narratives to serve a specific agenda, without adhering to ideals of objectivity or detachment from politics. They wrote in the vernacular for a mass audience that expected to be entertained, and that was accustomed to reading about reality in a way recalled the popular fiction of the past and present.

Tao's propensity to emphasize the personal drama of these years in *Anecdotes* contrasts with Li Jiannong's more measured approach in *Political History* that focuses less on individual personalities and more on the larger ideological contest between the reformers and the revolutionaries. The clearest example of the contrast between the two styles of history can be seen by comparing how these two narratives describe Song Jiaoren's death. Both relate the same basic information about when Song was murdered, and by whom, but Tao goes into far more detail about how the act was carried out, and how conspiracy was uncovered.

In describing the episode and its consequences, *Political History* assumes a tone that eschews melodrama, electing instead to merely list off the relevant facts. Concerning the actual assassination, Li writes: "[o]n March 20, 1913, Sung Chiao-jen [Song Jiaoren], on his way to catch a train northward from Shanghai, was shot and killed at the railroad station."¹³ Afterwards, Wu Shiyong and Ying Kuisheng, the two criminals directly responsible for Song's death, were immediately arrested, and their connection with the two government officials who masterminded the plot, cabinet secretary Hong Shuzu and premier Zhao Bingjun, was discovered. When the homes of Wu and Ying were searched, their correspondence with Hong and Zhao, using telegrams and coded language to coordinate their actions, were revealed. Li reproduces these materials in his narrative so as to clearly demonstrate the guilt of all the conspirators, Yuan included.¹⁴ This is an understated and factual chronicle of events, supported by the textual evidence that was uncovered by the subsequent investigation by the police. Li's stylistic choices here relegate one of modern China's most dramatic affairs into a mundane killing.

In contrast to Li's simple summary, *Anecdotes* recounts the episode in a far different way, full of poignant dialogue and dramatic detail. Tao describes the assassination of Song by depicting the appearance of the perpetrator, the reaction of the shocked witnesses, their frantic efforts to bring Song to a nearby hospital, and his final naïve hopes that Yuan would eventually become a moral ruler. On this last point, Tao's describes Song as follows: "[e]ven on his deathbed he did not forsake his illusions about Yuan, and still hoped that Yuan could be moved by his dying words to change his false nature into truth, his selfishness into selflessness, his trampling of the people into protecting the people, his disregard for the law into respect for the law."¹⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, Yuan would be denigrated as one of modern China's great villains when he betrayed the Republican cause in favor of his imperial ambitions three years later, making Song's words here all the more wretched and foolish.

¹³ Li Jiannong, *Political History*, 286.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁵ Tao, *Anecdotes*, Vol. 1., 185. Original: 他临死还没有抛弃对袁的幻想，还盼望袁能够为他的将死之言所感动，能够化伪为诚，化私为公，化蹂躏民权为保障民权，化弁髦法律为尊重法律。

Tao's talent for amplifying certain details to attract the attention of his readers continues in his description of how the conspirators were discovered and apprehended. An antique dealer came to the police with the story that Ying had offered him money to kill a certain man in a photograph whom he would only recognize later as Song. He testified, "Today, I saw a picture of Song Jiaoren in the newspaper [due to his death]. This was precisely who Ying Guixin [Kuisheng] had shown me a picture of and asked me to kill." It was on the basis of his testimony that the homes were raided and the plot unearthed.¹⁶ This is exciting testimony that Li leaves out of his narrative altogether. *Anecdotes* thus emphasizes the contingent nature of how Wu and Ying were caught, with the implication that, were it not for the guilty conscience of the antique dealer, the killers would still be unknown, heightening the drama of this incident, and thus the era.

Comparing these two depictions of Song's assassination and aftermath suggests what each historian consider to be important. For Li, it is more important to assemble the incontrovertible evidence that Yuan had organized a conspiracy to kill a political rival, making the intellectual case that his guilt should have been obvious to all, implicitly criticizing those in the Reform Party who continued to support him. The KMT Revolutionaries, in other words, not only have more integrity than the reformers in their refusal to compromise with Yuan, but also more intelligence in their ability to discern his culpability in the affair. In contrast, Tao is far more interested in connecting with his readers on an emotional level, drawing them into the excitement of the age. He does so by highlighting the melodrama of this episode, amplifying the tragedy of Song's death, the villainy of Yuan's ambition, and the unexpected willingness of an antique dealer to expose the link between the two. Tao's inclination to emphasize the spectacle of personal interactions is also illustrated by his portrayal of factional infighting and the military strongman who dominated the years immediately following the death of Yuan, Duan Qirui.

Sensationalistic Portrayals of Duan Qirui and Warlord Rivalries in *Anecdotes*

Anecdotes categorizes the various subperiods of its larger narrative based on the dominant figure of the era; for the 1911-1916 period this is Yuan Shikai; for the 1916-1920 period this is Duan Qirui. Duan was yet another former military cadet who had been educated in the new-style military academies, again representing a new and modern rebalancing of *wen* and *wu*. He served under Yuan during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion and the 1911 Wuchang Uprising, and was an instructor in the Baoding Military Academy that produced many Beiyang officers, allowing him to form his own group of loyalists. The two were also tied together through Duan's marriage to Yuan's niece, though that relationship was frayed by Duan's public opposition to Yuan's attempt to become emperor. Following Yuan's death, Duan was named premier of the government, but was actually seen to be the true power in the government. He was also head of the "Anhui Clique," one of the factions within the Beiyang Warlords.¹⁷

Duan may have been the true power behind the government, but its nominal head was Li Yuanhong (1864-1928). Also a graduate of one of the late Qing military academies, Li had been stationed in Hankow in October of 1911 as a loyal officer in the Hubei New Army.

¹⁶ Ibid. Original: 今天我在报上看见宋先生的照片，正是应桂馨叫我作为暗杀之对象的那张照片。

¹⁷ For more on Duan, see Hsi-ping Shao, "Tuan Ch'i-jui, 1912-1918: A Case Study of the Military Influence on Chinese Political Development," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1976.)

Following the outbreak of hostilities between the Qing and the revolutionaries, he was forced to defect to the anti-Qing forces, which he then led until the cease-fire was declared. For his role, he was named vice-president of the republic under Yuan Shikai, and was one of the leaders of what would eventually be called the Progressive Party. Though he supported Yuan in the Second Revolution, he did not do the same during Yuan's 1916 effort to be named emperor. After Yuan's death, he became president.¹⁸

In spite of the fact that Li was president and Duan was merely his premier, the latter's decisions were more important than the former, as demonstrated by Zhao Hengti's description of the post-Yuan Beiyang effort to bring China's southwest back under northern control, which he characterizes as an attempt by Duan Qirui to stamp out opposition to his personal rule.¹⁹ The Southwestern provinces of China—Yunnan, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Hunan—had formed the core of the anti-Yuan movement, and following his death, they remained resistant to Beiyang influence. Tan and Zhao had found a new ally, another Japanese Officer Academy graduate and Revolutionary Alliance member from Hunan named Cheng Qian (1882-1968), with whom they allied to eject Tang Xiangming from the governorship in 1916 and appoint Tan Yankai in his place. During Tan's second term as provincial governor, at least three different factions of the military thus emerged: those loyal to him, those loyal to Zhao, and those loyal to Cheng.²⁰

One reason why Duan was unable to bring Hunan back under central control was his problematic relationship with Li, his ostensible superior. As with the Song assassination, Tao Juyin's *Anecdotes* stresses the drama and emotion of their personal interactions, while Li Yuanhong's *Political History* describes these relationships in a far more clinical and distant way. The difference in emphasis creates an additional layer of historical interpretation that still informs our current understanding of the period, with historians continuing to subscribe to an interpretive framework oriented around individuals and alliances.

One relatively ordinary example of warlord infighting demonstrates the influence of the paradigm found in *Anecdotes*. In the fall of 1916, Duan Qirui's associate, Cabinet Secretary Xu Shuzheng (1880-1925) could not work with Li Yuanhong's ally, Interior Minister Sun Hongyi (1872-1936). As an assertion of his power over Li, Duan wanted Sun dismissed from office, and had Xu attempt to enforce his will. *Political History* merely describes the interactions between these four as relating to a "quarrel" during a tense cabinet meeting concerning the central government response to war in Guangdong province, far to the south. While Sun's more conciliatory approach to the situation was supported by the remainder of the cabinet, Xu pressed for an immediate military response, and independently directed military units to assemble, flouting Sun's supposed authority over domestic security matters such as these. Unsurprisingly, Sun "rebuked" Xu for his defiance, leading to a "lasting hatred" between the two that was only ended when Li dismissed the former from office, demonstrating Duan's ultimate authority over state affairs during this period.²¹ With the economy of detail that

¹⁸ Surprisingly little has been published in English on Li Yuanhong. Standard biographical information can be found in his entry in Howard Boorman, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, 5 Vols. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1967-1979)

¹⁹ Zhao, "Interview," 56. Original: 段祺瑞欲以武力蕩平西南護法勢力。

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ Li, *Political History*, 361.

characterizes the whole of *Political History*, Li Jiannong mentions little else about their months-long conflict, or anything more about the various personal interactions of the four.

Anecdotes, on the other hand, describes this same incident using lines of dialogue that could be taken from a movie or television drama. For example, following the quarrel between Sun and Xu, Xu is described as barging in to Li's office several times with an order for Sun's dismissal that he (and Duan) want Li to sign with his seal, since only Li, as President of the Republic, has the legal power to affix his seal and legally certify any such order dismissing a cabinet member. Li refuses each time, leading to the following exchange: "[Xu said], brazenly and impolitely, 'If the President does not seal this, Sun will be forbidden to attend cabinet meetings!' Hearing this sentence, Li's belly erupted with uncontrollable anger, and he suddenly shouted, 'What did you just say?!'"²² A few days later, Duan personally intercedes to support Xu, urging Sun to move on to a face-saving position in the provinces, or travel abroad for a time. Sun retorts he does not want any other position, and must protect his own integrity.²³ Duan, incensed, responds that everyone else will resign, and that Sun will have to run the government by himself.²⁴ Tao thus describes these four with little mention of their ideological background: Sun Hongyi was a Qing scholar and revolutionary activist in contrast to the military academy past of the other three, but this background has no relevance to this dispute. Instead the disagreement seems primarily predicated upon petty squabbles over spheres of influence.

The level of petty behavior in this exchange represents the style of narration that Tao uses throughout *Anecdotes*, featuring a cast of characters who are governed merely by their own individual interests, and without any loftier ideals or values. Focusing on this aspect of the text illustrates the author's emphasis on the quotidian interactions between these figures, rather than the more ideologically minded depiction that Li Jiannong confers in *Political History*. Tao's source for the dialogue he reproduces is unclear, and one must wonder whether or not he is accurately recording that which he has been told, or if he is wholly creating these verbal exchanges in order to make his point about petty individuals and fraught relationships more vividly. The small-mindedness of his subjects and dizzying number of interactions Tao provides his readers culminates in a portrait of an era in chaos, badly in need of rescue by a regime that can bring order and unity. This is not to say that he is incorrect about the political turmoil of the post-Yuan era, but rather this focus on the more sensationalistic aspects of the period is only one part of the fuller history.

That being said, it is easy to see how scholars studying the period might be attracted to Tao's narrative of political disintegration. By May 1917, Li would eventually tire of Duan's aggressive behavior, asking for his resignation. This act engendered even further political chaos, with one Beiyang general taking over the capital for ten days in an unsuccessful attempt to restore the Qing Dynasty in July and Sun Yatsen forming a rival Chinese state in Guangzhou in August. By the fall, Li resigned the presidency, and Duan returned to power. In 1918, Duan dispatched another invasion force to Hunan, led by Wu Peifu (1874-1939) and Zhang Jingyao (1881-1933), which compelled Zhao's retreat to southern Hunan, and established Beiyang

²² Tao, *Anecdotes*, Vol. 1., 545. Original: 很不禮貌地說：「總統不蓋印，就只能不准伯蘭（孫）出席國務會議！」黎聽了這句話，他的一肚子火氣實在關不住了，陡然大喝一聲：「你說的一句什麼話！」

²³ Ibid., 546. Original: 「甚麼官我都不要，只要維持我的人格。」

²⁴ Ibid. Original: 「好，我們大家都辭職，讓孫洪伊一個人去幹！」

hegemony over the province for the next two years. Zhang was named governor, and soldiers under his administration were notorious for atrocities that were said to be in excess of any other past regime. Having wanted the position for himself, Wu signaled his dissatisfaction by refusing to engage in further combat, preferring to preserve his forces for future conflicts. Cheng Qian, who was then provincial army commander-in-chief, was forced to leave Hunan in disgrace after his secret peace negotiations with Duan were exposed. Tan Yankai returned to Hunan, rejoining Zhao Hengti, and worked with intermediaries to communicate with Wu Peifu, persuading him to retreat to the north with a bribe of 600,000 silver coins. Stripped of Wu's military support, the highly unpopular Zhang Jingyao was forced from office in July 1920, and the stage was set for Tan's triumphant return as Hunan governor.²⁵

Petition Calling for the Removal of Tang Xiangming

Though it might seem from the above summary as though the workings of the provincial government were entirely dependent upon individual personality or relationships between ostensible rivals, unpublished archival material suggests a different perspective. Tan Yankai's second term as governor followed the three-year reign of Tang Xiangming, who was appointed by the Beiyang regime, and whose tenure was universally reviled. After his departure from Hunan in 1916, the provincial assembly petitioned the National Assembly in Beijing for his formal impeachment from office in 1917, nearly one year after the fact.²⁶

This is a seemingly mundane document, calling for retroactive legal recognition of what had already been realized in practice, but closer examination reveals its significance as an appeal to the national constitution. The petition begins with a reference to a finding by the Hunan Provincial Assembly from the previous December that investigated Tang Xiangming's policies and crimes, and how those materials had been formally forwarded to the National-level Interior Ministry in March.²⁷ Since there had been no favorable response, the assembly writes, they had no choice but to lodge this petition, as a form of censure for Tang. Referring to the Republic of China as a "Constitutional State," (立憲國家), the petition strenuously argues that Tang as a bureaucrat, should be punished for his violations for the law, and that a state that does not enforce the law sets a poor example for its people. Moreover, any nation governed by such a state is hardly a nation at all.²⁸

Indignant rhetoric aside, this petition is significant as an example of how bureaucratic communications as well as the value of obedience to the law still functioned during the "Warlord Era." Titles like "Provincial Governor" carried significance, and the same constitution that had been ridiculed for its ineffectiveness still informed political conversations, challenging the scorn expressed by Goodnow concerning Chinese respect for the rule of law that was described in the previous chapter of this dissertation. It is easy to be cynical about many of these rules and regulations that seemed to have no effect on practice, but this document shows how some kind of standard continued to persist, despite the constant flouting of those

²⁵ Zhao, "Interview", 59.

²⁶ Hunan Provincial Assembly, "請願參眾兩院轉咨辦前湘督湯薌銘文," [Petition to the National Assembly and Senate Concerning the Investigation of Ex-Hunan Military Governor Tang Xiangming] (May 5, 1917), in File 23-1-27, page 46, Hunan Provincial Archives, Changsha, Hunan, People's Republic of China.

²⁷ *ibid.* Original: 省議會暫行法第十七條之規定提出彈劾案

²⁸ *ibid.* Original: 官吏柱法於上，政府不能執法以繩，將人人效尤而國不國矣

standards by men like Duan or Yuan. Indeed, one scholar studying has even gone so far as to characterize the early Republican period of Chinese history as a 'golden era' for the ability of local concerns to bring their needs to the central state, citing other examples resulting in concrete action.²⁹

Furthermore, the petition against Tang builds upon a long historical legacy of imperial China that had encouraged those at the local level to complain and remonstrate against their magistrate or even their provincial governor to the central court. For example, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1664), systems of communication were created to make sure local officials could be held accountable for their misdeeds, to the point of truly heinous action resulting in impeachment.³⁰ The Palace Memorial system was created during the Qing to supplement the official lines of communication and bypass the bureaucracy, enabling the Emperor to ensure that his officials were honest in their reports to him; complaints and petitions to remove bad officials from office were often transmitted in this way as well.³¹ This 1917 petition by the Hunan Provincial Assembly clearly falls in line with this tradition.

Beyond its symbolism as a tie to the imperial past, and its significance as an appeal to a possible constitutionally governed future, this petition also suggests that provincial assemblies were more important than previously suspected. One scholar has characterized these organizations as accomplishing "little of substance;" they were more honest and rational prior to 1911, but became more corrupt and poorly-run after the founding of the republic.³² Yet the political courage required to construct and send this petition, asking for the Beiyang regime to remove its own member from office, signals that the Hunan Provincial Assembly was more important than previously understood.

Thus, while the conventional historiography of the period stresses the unilateral and near despotic actions of the Beiyang state appointing and removing men like Tang from office, this needs to be juxtaposed against the vocabulary that bodies like the Hunan Provincial Assembly employed in protest. Li Jiannong, Tao Juyin, and other historians correctly characterize the warlord period as one of great disunity, filled with conflicts that seemed to have little reason or logic beyond the selfish desires of power-hungry soldiers. This chaos is contrasted to revolutionary ideology of the Nationalist Party that *Political History* explicitly praises, or the Socialist ideology of the Communist Party that *Anecdotes* implicitly valorizes. According to them, the Republic of China was a government in name alone, with the former Qing empire seemed hopelessly divided between rival governments as well as brutish warlords. The farce of Yuan Shikai's attempt to become emperor as well as the short-lived Manchu restoration created enormous cynicism about the law as well as China's future prospects for a

²⁹ Qiang Fang, "A Hot Potato: The Chinese Complaint Systems from Early Times to the Present," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Buffalo, 2006).

³⁰ Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1998), 30-34.

³¹ Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723-1820* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1991); R. Kent Guy, "Rule of Man and Rule of Law in China: Punishing Provincial Governors During the Qing, in Karen G. Turner, ed., *The Limits of the Rule of Law in China* (Seattle, WA.: University of Washington Press, 2015).

³² C'hang Peng-yuan [Zhang Pengyuan], "Provincial Assemblies: The Emergence of Political Participation, 1909-1914, in *Chinese Studies in History*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (1984), 3-23.

unified republic. Yet this 1917 petition suggests that this is only part of the story. Things were not as dire as *Political History* or *Anecdotes* might have its readers believe; there was clearly bureaucratic communication and local governance in spite of factionalism and discord at the center. In addition, vibrant discussions among the nation's leading intellectuals were emerging that implicitly valorized peaceful and gradual reform, indicating that the chaos was not all-encompassing. One of these was Li Jiannong, who had recently returned from England with an idea that he thought might save China from its historical cycles of unity and disunity: federalism.

Li Jiannong and Federalism

In the aftermath of Song Jiaoren's assassination, Li Jiannong had fled China to study in England. After three years in exile, Li Jiannong returned to China, where he found a second career as an advocate for shifting the Chinese state from a unitary to a federal system of governance. In 1917, he and some other returnees founded a monthly periodical they called *The Pacific* (太平洋雜誌). In its pages, he authored a number of different essays concerning national politics, constitutionalism, and federalism. Li's overall tone is one of moderation and objectivity, depicting a model of how the modern Chinese state should look, and arguing that this ideal needs to be achieved in a peaceful fashion. His work in these pages thus implicitly argues for a *wen*-oriented paradigm that creates change through words and ideas, and against the *wu*-model of military conquest that had been the method of both the Revolutionaries as well as the recently deceased Yuan Shikai. This 1917 attitude needs to be placed in the overall context of his support for the Nationalist Party in 1911 and his antagonism towards the reformers in his 1930 *Political History*: during this stage of his political career, he would be better categorized among those reformers whom he had criticized so heavily.

In the latter part of the year, he wrote an essay in two parts titled "The Issue of Unifying the Republic," (民國統一問題) that is worth examining in depth to get a sense of his thought during this period as well as the broader intellectual environment in the post-Yuan era. In 1922, he would write a third part to this series to address how circumstances changed in the intervening five years; the epilogue to this dissertation will examine that text in more depth. These are not previously unknown essays: for example, Jean Chesneaux draws heavily from *The Pacific* to produce one of the few Western-language studies of the federalist movement. He convincingly shows that federalists like Li were both inspired by the West and part of the traditional social elite, in sharp contrast to the radicals and revolutionaries who would later gain power. However, he focuses largely on essays published after 1921, after provincial constitutions proposing a federalist system had been promulgated, arguing that these authors were merely justifying what had already been accomplished. In doing so, Chesneaux avoids considering how earlier debates in periodicals like *The Pacific* might have informed those same provincial constitutions, effectively dismissing whatever influence Li and his colleagues might have had on the process.³³

³³ Jean Chesneaux, "The Federalist Movement in China, 1920-3," in *Modern China's Search For a Political Form*, ed. Jack Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1969), 96-137; other Western-language studies of essays from *The Pacific* include Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation : Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1995), and Joshua Hill, *Voting as a Rite: A History of Elections in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2019). For a historical overview of federalism that includes more

In his essays, Li is clear about what he means by federalism: a system of governance in which national power is shared with the provinces and counties instead of concentrated in the capital. For the purposes of his essay, he describes three different systems of government: a unitary state (單一), a federation (聯邦), and confederation (邦聯). The unitary state is perhaps the easiest to understand: it is the central state that does not share power with local government but instead controls all, in a hierarchical way. In Li's typology, the quintessential example of a unitary state is England, where political power emanates from Parliament and the central government. Pre-1911 China might also be understood to be an example of this as well, where ultimate authority is invested in the person of the emperor, and local officials at all levels are selected and appointed by the center. This is a form of government in which power emanates from the center outward.

The difference between the federation and confederation models is a bit harder to discern. In both, power is shared between central and local government, but the proportions are different. A confederation is a political system wherein authority resides with local governments, who form a nation together. Li believes Switzerland best exemplifies this system: the various cantons exist as independent polities that work in cooperation to form a modern nation state. A federation is system where that same authority is more evenly divided between central and local governments. For Li, the United States is an example of this federal system, and is the best possible form of government for the Republic of China to model itself after. One might think of a spectrum spanning between the extremes of centralization and decentralization; unitary rule would represent the first extreme, and confederation the second. Federalism would fall somewhere between the two.

Given China's size and diversity, Li believes it should transform itself into a federated system of governance, in which power is shared between the central government and the provinces. The unitary system that had worked under the Qing would not allow for a modern state to adequately respond to so many of its people. In this, Li is clearly mindful of the first years of the republic under Yuan, in which the national assembly seemed remote and separate from the needs of the general populace. Moreover, the constitutional ideals inherited from the Qing New Reform experiments had valorized responsiveness to the people in order to achieve a union of state and society. For Li, federalism provided the best mechanism for insuring this needed unity.

In this first essay, Li goes on to vividly describe the knee-jerk reactions that the term "federalism" receives, as if those who advocate for this system also support the division of China into independent states. He is clearly mindful here of the larger political context, with two rival national governments in Beijing and Canton, as well as various provinces being ruled by individual warlords. He is also aware that those who oppose federalism argue that implementing this system constitutes a dramatic devolution of power to local governments that would inevitably result the disintegration of the nation. This system, in other words, would create a new set of nations, perhaps divided along provincial boundaries, where there had previously been one. The foreign powers who had carved out various sphere of influence since

of the twentieth century, see Steven Philips, "The Demonization of Federalism in Republican China," in Emilian Kavalski and Magdalena Zolkos, eds., *Defunct Federalisms: Critical Perspectives on Federalism's Failure*. (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2008), 87-102.

the Opium Wars could only be pleased by this result; a unified nation had not been able to resist their might, and so a divided nation could only be weaker. Li was surely mindful of his own background as one who had spent time abroad, and so open to the critique that he was merely advancing the interests of foreign imperialists.

To these various critics, Li counters by claiming that the China of 1917 is unified in name only, and that its current political state is already deeply fragmented. Paradoxically, attempting to continue attempting to use a highly centralized system for unifying China would only result in further disunity. The previous system of autocratic despotism makes a poor fit for such a large population, as demonstrated by the squabbling and factionalism that paralyzed the Republic of China during its first years. Furthermore, the example of two attempts to restore the monarchy suggest how unitary government could pervert the republican state from reverting to the very imperial form of rule that so many had fought. Li is not naïve about the domestic and international challenges that transforming the state might entail; this is not a problem that can be resolved quickly or easily. However, federalism still represents China's best hope to return to a position of true unity (真正統一), as distinguished from unity in name only.³⁴

The second essay, published shortly after the first, is thematically very close in tone and substance. Li's ostensible motive for writing is to address the support for federalism as expressed by Xiong Xiling (1870-1939), a former premier of the central government under Yuan Shikai who had become involved in charitable social causes after resigning in 1914. Xiong was a native of Fenghuang, a city in West Hunan, and had been a member of the Qing scholar-elite, obtaining his *jinshi* degree in 1894. He, along with Liang Qichao, had been one of the leaders of Changsha's School for Current Affairs during the late Qing. He then studied in Japan for several years before joining the 1905 Qing foreign mission that examined the constitutions of other nations and encouraged the Qing court along the path towards constitutional monarchy. In the post 1911 era, he was a prominent member of the Reform party that had worked with Yuan Shikai against the Nationalists before retiring from public life by 1917 to become one of the nation's foremost philanthropists.³⁵

For Li and other supporters of federalism, Xiong's position is surprising as well as gratifying, as he was previously opposed to the cause. However, Li's essay cautions his readers to avoid interpreting Xiong's change of position to mean that he also abandoned his earlier opinions regarding the separation of military and civilian power. Evidently, Xiong had been a proponent of both unitary rule as well as the peaceful modernization of the state and nation; Li wants to make sure that all know his position on the first matter changed, but not his position on the second. Indeed, Li continues, military power is precisely the wrong way to unify a nation. According to him, Bismarck did not unify the German states through military conquest; he directed the Prussian military against only those states which could never be a part of the future federation. In contrast, those who joined Prussia to form Germany did so through peaceful means, without being forced into an alliance. The actual history of Germany's creation

³⁴ Li Jiannong 李劍農, 民國統一問題 [The Issue of Unifying the Republic] in *Pacific Magazine* [太平洋雜誌], Vol. 1, No. 8, 1-15. All essays from *Pacific Magazine* are taken from reproductions available via 大成老期刊全文数据库 [Dacheng Modern China Journal Database]: (<http://laokan.dachengdata.com/tuijian/showTuijianList.action>)

³⁵ For more on Xiong in English, see Zhou Qiuguang, "Modern Chinese Educational Philanthropy," trans. Edward McCord, *Republican China* 19, no. 1 (1994): 51-83; for information on his wife, see Xia Shi, *At Home in the World*.

is not so simple, but the ideal type Li creates is clear: a federalist modernization of the state that is accomplished via peaceful means.

By implication, previous Chinese dynasties, all of which had conquered through military force, were never successful in creating true unity. These dynasties came to power through the exercise of military might, maintained their authority through the threat of military might, and fell once that military might was insufficient for controlling the empire. The rapid disintegration of the republican state into rival polities after 1911 shows how those who were ostensibly unified under Qing rule were not truly together as a modern nation. The fragile unity that was produced via force might have been sufficient for territorial security and economic prosperity in the premodern era, but modern nations required a much more substantive unity.³⁶

Li's advocacy for federalism helped to start a larger nation-wide federalist movement, and he was given the opportunity to implement some of his ideas as the chair of the committee in charge of drafting Hunan's Provincial Constitution in 1920, but his ideas were never implemented on the national level. Perhaps one reason for this is because he was never as prolific of a political essayist as his peers, choosing instead to work in provincial administration, teach, and write history. These methods were not conducive to mass politics that were to emerge in China. In contrast, intellectuals like Liang Qichao, Hu Shi (1891-1962), and Zhang Shizhao (1881-1973) were all more nationally prominent as writers or officials, and maintained higher public profiles that made their association with federalism more well-known.

Federalism was also opposed by many who believed that further decentralization would only result in the splitting of the nation. Wu Peifu argued that that the system would constitute "retrogression from centralization back into separate individual states,"³⁷ and, with the carving up of the empire by foreign powers into various spheres of influence that had begun after the Opium Wars, it seemed as though Wu's fears were coming to pass. Li's cause was not helped by the fact that many of those favoring his ideas controlled provinces that wished to maintain their autonomy, making their support appear blatantly self-serving. Finally, the association of Federalism with Chen Jiongming, who would go on to betray Sun Yatsen in Guangdong in 1922, meant that the concept was anathema for those who valorized Sun in the years after.³⁸

Why did Li advocate for this form of political change in 1917, merely six years after his fervent support for the violence of the Wuchang uprising? Would he now describe himself as a reformist instead of a revolutionary? Perhaps he had come to favor a different interpretation of what revolution might mean to China, stepping away from the violent overthrow of a state and towards the radical transformation of attitudes and minds? If so, his perspective on change appears more conservative than not: though he argues for what amounts to be a radical change in political structure, he does not address social change at all. Moreover, this critique of military conquest as a method for achieving true unity adds an interesting layer to his 1930 *Political History* that strongly favored revolution over reform. After another seventeen years of witnessing the dysfunctional politics of his day, it is plausible that his perspective on this topic

³⁶ Li Jiannong 李劍農, "Minguo Tongyi Wenti" 民國統一問題 [The Issue of Unifying the Republic] in *Pacific Magazine* [太平洋雜誌], Vol. 1, No. 9, 1-13.

³⁷ Wou, *Militarism in Modern China*, 43; Arthur Waldron describes the debate between Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu on this topic in "Warlordism vs. Federalism: The Revival of a Debate?" in *The China Quarterly*, No. 121, (Mar. 1990), 116-128.

³⁸ Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement*.

shifted between writing these essays and writing his textbook. It is perhaps more interesting, however, to consider how his conceptualization of revolution might have changed over the years. Redefining it in a way that prizes federalism as the “true” political revolution that China needed in 1917 allows his readers to move beyond thinking of China as a territory that needs to be centrally governed, and that allows for more diversity and local autonomy than we otherwise might believe realistic.

Conclusion

The years immediately after 1916 have been classified as the era of high warlordism in modern China. On the national level, various factions seemed to be endlessly jockeying for dominance, making the political history of the period complex and confusing. Duan Qirui has been described as the key mover behind national politics in these, but his supremacy was clearly not as unassailable as Yuan’s, as demonstrated by his disagreements with Li Yuanhong. Li was legally in a superior position as President to Duan’s Premier, but their titles seemed to matter far less than their personal connections to their peers and subordinates.

This turmoil in Beijing informed the independence of Hunan from the central government, as local leaders took advantage of national uncertainty to assert their autonomy and advocate for the province’s interests. Yuan’s weakness following his failed attempt to become emperor enabled Tan’s second tenure as governor. When Duan was able to assert his power, a Beiyang proxy was installed as Tan’s replacement yet again. By 1920, when his hold over the province had weakened again, Tan appeared poised for a third term.

The chaos of the era is accentuated in Tao Juyin’s *Anecdotes*, in a way that skews the perceptions of his readers towards believing that the key actors for the period were amoral, selfish, and power-hungry. While this is not an inaccurate assessment, his efforts to provide entertaining drama join with his position as a writer in 1956 China to overemphasize these aspects of the period. His tone and style have informed the manner in which subsequent histories have been written; more directly for the purposes of this dissertation, emphasizing competition between ostensible allies who are actually opponents seems to match well with the mutiny that occurs in November 1920, and the subsequent transfer of power from Tan to Zhao.

This chapter has used a 1917 petition by the Hunan Provincial Assembly to argue that this narrative of political chaos is oversimplified and warrants reexamination. This content of this document appeals to the national constitution, suggesting how the rule of law was an important value in the political culture of China’s early republic, in spite of Tao’s implications to the contrary. Moreover, the very existence of this document indicates that the bureaucratic communications that had unified the previous imperial system were still in operation, challenging Tao’s individual-centered interpretive paradigm.

The federalism of the newly returned Li Jiannong constitutes a second challenge to the dominant narrative given by *Anecdotes*. While his ideas did not seem to have nationwide support, his reputation as one of China’s leading federalists led to his chairing the committee writing Hunan’s constitution, showing that ideals of peaceful reform retained some influence. His belief in the ability of local polities to join with each other as well as the central government in federated unity seems poorly timed for an era of such confusion. Perhaps his ideas would

have gained greater traction had the politics of the era been more stable, and the fear of local governors splitting off their territories into independent states been less realistic. On the other hand, Li clearly saw his ideas as the ideal solution for the problems of the time, since the replacement of a centralized empire with a centralized republic seemed to be such an abject failure.

Throughout *Anecdotes*, Tao Juyin depicts warlords as separatists rather than innovators who experimented with constitutional reforms, educational movements, or other initiatives in a period of flux. Regardless, the subsequent military unification of China would overshadow any gains that they had achieved. Furthermore, by the 1950s, “centralized unification” as a discourse had triumphed completely over “constitutional federalism,” which was perceived to be an empty excuse for separatist policy. *Anecdotes* thus reflects Tao’s eagerness in the 1950s to dismiss provincial self-governance and constitutional federalism: two ideas that were particularly relevant for Hunan in 1920, as they were justifications used by Tan Yankai to maintain his power and his autonomy from the central state. As the next chapter will illustrate, Tan’s efforts had mixed results.

Chapter 4: Factionalism, Betrayal, and the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny

Introduction

This chapter collects and analyzes conventional histories of the November 1920 transition of power from Tan to Zhao to illustrate how particular aspects of this event have been emphasized in a way to exemplify the chaos of the warlord years. These include the conflicts between *wen-* and *wu-* oriented individuals, the use of documents like the Hunan Provincial Constitution or concepts like federalism as thinly veiled excuses for self-serving behavior, betrayals by erstwhile allies, and the necessity of revolutionary unity for saving China. While the subsequent success of the KMT and CCP demonstrate the power of revolution to bring about change, this dissertation challenges teleological versions of this argument by using previously unpublished archival material to show how local governance in provinces like Hunan was far more functional than typically portrayed.

One interpretation of the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny is that it represents the nadir of local administration in Hunan, in which an ineffective scholar-official of the pre-1911 era was replaced by a new-style militarist minor warlord. This chapter deconstructs how this narrative has been transmitted and challenges one of its key points—that civilian governor Tan Yankai was an unfocused and effectual leader—by using his English-language exercise books from the year he was exiled to southern Hunan, immediately prior to the 1920 mutiny. Examining these texts shows that his seemingly unrushed and pointless daily activities should be better understood conscious efforts to enhance his *wu-*credentials position himself for future opportunities to gain power. Since these materials were not intended for public consumption, in contrast to the published oral histories or newspaper articles which have undergirded the conventional narrative, they offer more revealing insights into his character.

At first glance, it is easy to see why Tan has been commonly interpreted as an elitist dabbler in politics, unfit for the turmoil of the warlord decade. After Zhang Jingyao left Hunan, Tan Yankai became governor for a third and final time, from July to November of 1920. During this short period, Tan engaged in a number of policy innovations, including advocating for a provincial constitution, which built upon the legacies of the Qing New Policies as well as Frank Goodnow's abortive efforts to bring a stronger rule of law to the new Republic. Because this constitution was necessarily provincial, this meant that Tan was advocating for a similar federal conception of Hunan's role within the larger Chinese state that Li Jiannong had proposed in 1917. Using the general slogan of "provincial autonomy" (地方自治), he declared his support for a policy of "Hunanese governing Hunan" (湘人治湘) in which provinces like Hunan would be governed by local elites like himself.¹ While critics like Tao Juyin saw Tan's support for this movement as merely scheming to enhance his own power, this seems implausible, as it would have been far more pragmatic to disavow federalism and join any of the other extra-provincial alliances if that was his only goal.² Instead, Tan was more likely attempting to accomplish

¹ For one example of his use of such language, see his October 25, 1920 speech to the Hunan Provincial Assembly, in 湖南省議會第四次臨時會議事錄 [Minutes from the Fourth Meeting of the Temporary Hunan Provincial Assembly] in File 23-1-35, page 10, Hunan Provincial Archives, Changsha, Hunan, People's Republic of China

² The fullest expression of Tao's critique can be found in Tao, *Anecdotes* Vol. 2, 520-3, and is treated in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

multiple goals simultaneously: creating a popular mandate that might enhance Hunan's independence from Beiyang intimidation, proposing a plan by which the constant conflict might cease, and preserving his own position as governor.

Aside from his support for federalism, Tan also pushed for democratic elections for the position of provincial governor, as well as a further reduction in military expenses. He invited nationally prominent academics like Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936), Zhang Ji (1882-1947), and Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) to give public lectures on the subjects of federalism and constitutionalism. While in China, John Dewey (1859-1952) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) also toured Hunan, and expressed their approval for Tan's policies.³ These policies were not just meant to give credence to Tan's rule, in the way that emperors had long invited reclusive scholars to court as a form of validation; nor was Tan "soliciting talent" to work in his government, since they were simply sojourning through Hunan. These invitations were symbolic of a true effort to educate citizens in a new democratic system, and to legitimate the systematic nature of democracy beyond Tan's own charismatic or personal rule. In the aftermath of Zhang Jingyao's brutal reign, Tan's third term as governor gained enthusiastic accolades, as he promised to transform the province from a site of wartime atrocities to a model for local governance.

However, military conflicts just outside Hunan's borders created great tensions within. As noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, the province's physical location along the primary north-south routes of commercial travel meant that Hunan was militarily important as a stepping-stone for the rival governments in Guangzhou and Beijing. Moreover, each of those northern and southern states were themselves riven with factionalism. Sun Yatsen was in exile in Shanghai, having been recently removed from his position as head of the southern Guangzhou state, and was seeking allies to help him return to power. In the north, Wu Peifu had led a coalition of forces to victory in the week-long Zhili-Anhui war, and Duan Qirui had fallen from power. The typically fluid nature of Chinese politics had become even more so, as various military generals vied for power and supremacy.

Moreover, the surface appearance of peace and prosperity in Hunan after Zhang Jingyao masked the same tensions among ostensible allies that characterized the previous eras of rule. Tan's actual authority over the province as a whole was limited, and he was forced to send his more trusted military units to distant counties in order to maintain his power and quell possible challenges to his rule. On November, while one of these units was in remote West Hunan, another mutiny broke out in Pingjiang, where one of his more trusted subordinates was killed in the fighting. The march of mutinous troops on Changsha forced Tan, who had little military support that could be mobilized to his immediate aid, to resign in favor of his military ally Zhao Hengti and to flee the province for a third and final time.

The Betrayal of Zhao Hengti

Conventional histories attack Tan's replacement Zhao Hengti for backstabbing his erstwhile ally and superior, as exemplified by the description of events given by Hunan's most famous political figure, Mao Zedong. During the 1918-1920 reign of Zhang Jingyao as governor of Hunan, Mao was an educator, activist, and firsthand witness in Changsha to the tumult of

³ For more on Russell's experience, see Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (London: Routledge, [1967-9], 1998), 174-5.

local politics. Though he was a relatively young man in 1920, and not a key player in the drama that would follow, his prominence over China in the years to come, and the consequent influence over how history is interpreted, cannot be overstated. Thus, it should come as no surprise that his perspective on this transition from Tan to Zhao has set the tone for how it is remembered. In 1936, as the guerilla leader of the CCP hiding in Yanan from the KMT, Mao gave a series of interviews to the American journalist Edgar Snow in which he described the politics of his home province. According to Mao,

T'an Yen-kai [Tan Yankai] was driven out of Hunan by a militarist called Chao Heng-t'i [Zhao Hengti], who utilized the 'Hunan independence' movement for his own ends. He pretended to support it, advocating the idea of a United Autonomous States of China, but as soon as he got power he suppressed the democratic movement with great energy... when Chao Heng-t'i seized control he betrayed all the ideas he had supported, and especially he violently suppressed all demands for democracy.⁴

For Mao, the mutiny was not the key reason behind Tan's departure. Instead, Zhao seized power in a betrayal of not only his one-time superior, but also the ideals of democracy and provincial autonomy that he had supposedly supported. In this, Mao builds upon the overall portrayal of the warlord period as constructed by Tao in that he emphasizes the betrayal of a *wen*-oriented bureaucrat by a *wu*-oriented militarist, the ease with which ideals are cast aside by the power-hungry, and the bankruptcy of ostensibly reformist non-revolutionaries. By implication, a true revolution that is led by an organization fulfilling both *wen* and *wu* ideals is necessary to save Hunan and China more broadly. It is not a coincidence that Mao framed his CCP as precisely that organization.

A few other aspects about Mao's relationship with Zhao are worth noting. First, Zhao was the governor in charge of Hunan from 1920-1926, and in this role Zhao suppressed communist activity. Famously, it was at his order that the anarchist labor organizers Huang Ai (1897-1922) and Pang Renquan (1897-1922) were executed for leading a strike of mill workers. Because Zhao represented the state against which Mao and the communists were organizing for much of the 1920s, it should be no surprise that there was great enmity between the two that surely informed Mao's perspective on the 1920 transition of power.⁵

During his lifetime and after, Mao's interpretation of modern Chinese history dominated the framework within which events like those of November 1920 were chronicled, and the oral histories that were recorded, collected, and published during this period of time reflect Mao's power and authority. The memories of Yao Daci (1888-?), a disciple of Sun Yatsen, are but one example of this: while Tao Juyin claims that Zhao failing to support Tan against the mutiny resulted in the latter's departure, Yao contends that Zhao was actually part of the conspiracy that instigated the mutiny.⁶ In his luridly titled memoir of the event, "Zhao Hengti's Bloody-handed Plot to Rise to the Top," Yao alleges that Sun Yatsen and other conspirators outside

⁴ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 138.

⁵ Lynda Shaffer, *Mao and the Workers: The Hunan Labor Movement, 1920-1923*, (Armonk, NY.: M.E. Sharpe, 1982) 45-49.

⁶ Biographical information on Yao is sparse; one of the only references available can be found online: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/姚大慈>

Hunan all plotted with Zhao to remove Tan Yankai in order to lay the foundations for the future Northern Expedition. Though the overall argument is made clear from the title of Yao's history, it is worth highlighting the logic of the article, as suggested by its first paragraph:

In the fall of 1920, Sun Yatsen's plan to expel the Guangxi clique from Guangdong was quickly coming to fruition. He wanted to obtain Hunan, so as to make troop movements in future Northern Expedition more convenient. At that time, Hunan was under the control of Tan Yankai, an appointee of Lu Rongting's faction. Cheng Songyun [another name for Cheng Qian] was in Shanghai, so Sun Yatsen decided to scheme about Hunanese affairs with Cheng Songlao [yet another name for Cheng Qian]. Songlao knew that the situation in Hunan had changed much, and he was unsure about what conditions there were like, so he ordered my older brother Dayuan to return to Hunan to investigate. He said, "if Zhao Hengti can cooperate with us to overthrow Tan Yankai, afterwards Hunan will obey the orders of Sun Yatsen and participate in a Northern Expedition." (After the Guangdong revolution and establishment of a government there, Sun Yatsen appointed Zhao Hengti military and civil governor of Hunan.)⁷

In Yao's narrative, Sun and the Cheng brothers schemed in Shanghai to depose Tan for their national ambitions, and rewarded Zhao by formally confirming his positions later. Zhao's culpability is implicit, but still apparent. As with Tao, competition between factions and among individuals is the primary driver of events, with what had been described as a local conflict (in Tao's rendition) now more explicitly connected to the larger national context through personal networks. Sun Yatsen's manipulation of local politics to further his own power echoes the 1913 machinations of Yuan Shikai to work through middlemen in the assassination of Song Jiaoren. The name of Cheng Qian, the former army commander who retained some followers in Hunan, is also mentioned here, and it becomes clear that a large number of Tan's opponents were conspiring to oust him from Hunan. What binds them together seems to be shared goals and personal connections, rather than similar ideologies or revolutionary sentiments. Thus, both Tao and Yao seemingly point to a lack of coherent political ideology as somehow synonymous with the absence of moral integrity.

The oral history of Huang Yi'ou (黄一欧, 1892-1981) echoes many of the same points. Huang, the son of the revolutionary martyr Huang Xing, states that he was closely connected with many of the figures involved in the removal of Tan, and claims some of the credit for Tan's departure for himself. His version of events, "Recollections of Tan Yankai's Fall and the Deaths of Li Zhonglin and Others," goes into more detail about the mutiny that provoked Tan's departure. In this text, Huang begins by recalling being sent by Sun Yatsen to Changsha in order

⁷ Yao Daci 姚大慈, "赵恒惕上台的阴谋和血手 [Zhao Hengti's Bloody-handed Plot to Rise to the Top]," in 湖南文史资料选辑. Vol 30. (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenshi Chubanshe, 1981) 129-139, 40: Original: 1920 年秋, 孙中山先生在上海策划驱逐广东的桂系已相当成熟, 并欲取得湖南, 以为将来出师北伐的便利。是时湖南局面为陆荣廷委派之督军兼省长谭延闿所统治。值程颂云先生亦在上海, 中山先生乃以图取湖南事属之程颂老。颂老以湖南迭经变化, 情况不够明了, 乃命先兄大愿回湘察看; 语之曰: "若赵恒惕能与我合作倒谭, 事成之后, 湖南须听中山先生之命参加北伐。(后来广东革命政府成立, 中山先生尝令派赵恒惕为湖南督军兼省长, 赵恒惕没有接受。)"

to better assess the situation and persuade Tan Yankai to more unwaveringly join the KMT. As before, it seems as though Tan's commitment to the revolution was suspect, as with many former reformers. According to Huang, Sun gave him the following command: "if Tan Yankai is unwilling to become a revolutionary, then remove him from office; whoever does so I will make Hunan provincial military governor."⁸ Hearing this, Huang responded, "He is used to seeing which way the wind blows, and speaking to the revolutionary party yet never revealing his true thoughts, so it will be hard to persuade him to join our cause."⁹ Huang's narrative thus reifies a distinction between reformer and revolutionary and condemns Tan for failing to properly align himself with the revolutionary ideology of the KMT.

In this exchange, several themes emerge that resonate with the arguments presented in the other histories. Tan seems to have a propensity to reveal little about his own intentions, waiting until the majority have decided upon a path before selecting the option that has the least amount of risk for himself, which shares some aspects of depiction given by Tao Juyin. Sun Yatsen's desire to bring Hunan to the revolutionary flag also echoes the claims of Tao and Yao concerning extra-provincial pressure on Hunan's internal politics. Finally, the realpolitik of the situation, wherein all concerned—Sun, Huang, and Tan alike—are merely trying to determine how best to preserve their own interests, also supports Tao's portrayal of the period as a time of deep factionalism and competition.

On November 13th, the mutiny in Pingjiang county broke out which would eventually cause Tan's resignation. According to Huang, though this action was supposedly concerning provisions and salary, it was actually based on loyalty felt by the mutineers to their old commander, Cheng Qian, and their resentment towards Tan for Cheng's departure. Their new commander, Xiao Changchi (1879-1920), was a trusted subordinate of Tan's who had been stationed in Pingjiang to suppress those ill-feelings, but his efforts had failed and he had died because of his connection to Tan. The leader of the mutineers was Yu Yingxiang (?-?), who had the support of his fellow Cheng Qian clique member Li Zhonglin (1886-1920), the commander in nearby Liling county. On the 18th, Tan held a meeting to abolish the position of military governor, and expressed his willingness to yield the post of Army commander to Zhao. This attempt to ensure Zhao's loyalty failed. As a result, according to Huang:

Tan Yankai felt utterly isolated, and his situation was becoming more and more critical. On the 23rd he convened another emergency meeting of the military and civilian authorities and their representatives and announced the immediate dissolution of the military and civil governor positions. He also strongly urged Zhao Hengti to take the post of Hunan Army commander-in-chief, with the provincial assembly selecting a temporary civil governor. In that meeting, Zhao affected an air of apathy, and announced only that he would not become

⁸ Huang Yi'ou 黄一欧, "谭延闿被迫下台和李仲麟等被杀的回忆 [Memories of Tan Yankai Being Ousted and the Death of Li Zhonglin and others]," in 湖南文史资料选辑 [Selections from the Historical and Cultural Materials of Hunan], Vol. 4. (Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1981), 1-16, 4. Original: 如果谭延闿不愿意革命, 就把他拿下来; 谁把谭延闿拿下来, 我就让他做湖南督军。

⁹ Ibid., Original: 他惯于'见风使舵', 对于革命党说话时, 从不露一句真话, 所以很难望他同我们走一条路。

commander-in-chief, and was willing to only use the title of division commander to maintain peace in the province.¹⁰

Presumably, this November 23 meeting was the same as that identified by Tao Juyin as the crucial moment when Tan realized his fate and wept. In contrast Tan's previous proposal, this second meeting was public, making Zhao's refusal a rebuke of Tan's authority. Thus, Zhao's inaction in front of the Hunan political elite seems to be what pushes Tan out, as Tan could not maintain power after such a humiliating loss of face.

On this last point, it is important to note that Zhao made no overt action of betrayal, demonstrating how the appearance of loyalty and proper behavior retains significance. Even if we are to take the anecdotes described by Tao and these oral histories at face value, Zhao was still unable to openly defy Tan or question his rule. Instead, it is his inaction, rather than any explicit act, that causes Tan to leave. Huang later goes into detail regarding Zhao's execution of Li Zhonglin and the other mutineers, so it is unlikely he neglects to mention any obvious enmity out of sympathy for the individuals involved. Indeed, hidden antagonism is a theme that Huang weaves throughout the story, describing the Tan-Zhao relationship as "seemingly united but actually estranged, ostensible partners with different agendas."¹¹ In other words, though they both pretended to be allies, in reality they were rivals. This reading of their interactions is important to remember as we begin to consider possible alternatives to this conventional interpretation of this incident: the professed friendship between Zhao and Tan that will be described in the next chapter could merely be an extension of these deceptive practices.

In the aftermath of this meeting, Zhao accepts the position of commander-in-chief the next day, while Tan boards a boat to Shanghai three days later. Huang laments the fact that Tan was unable to stay in Changsha the one day more necessary to receive the body of his recently deceased wife, which had been travelling upstream for burial; ironically and tragically, their ships pass each other in Yueyang, but neither is able to stop. Afterwards, according to Huang, Tan found 100,000 silver dollars waiting for him in Shanghai, and would receive another 20,000 yuan as a gift from Zhao every year thereafter. In spite of this apologetic bribe, enmity would persist between Zhao and Tan for years afterwards. Huang concludes by noting that it was not unusual for Tan to hold such a grudge, as he himself was blocked from later positions in the KMT government by Tan for his role in this matter. For his part, Zhao would order the death of Li Zhonglin and other conspirators less than one month later, in what Huang described as "friends becoming enemies via the brazen reach of a bloody hand,"¹² eliminating potential rivals for power and cementing his own authority.

In Huang's account, Zhao Hengti is a treacherous and power-hungry militarist who schemes and murders his way to the highest political office in Hunan, nicely fitting with the overall trends of the warlord era. Pingjiang garrison commander Xiao Changchi as well as the conspirator Li Zhonglin are both killed because of Zhao's ambition, much in the same way Song

¹⁰ Ibid., 9. Original: 谭延闿看到众叛亲离，形势越来越严重，于二十三日再次召集军政负责人和各团体代表举行紧急会议，宣布即日解除军政职务，坚请赵恒惕继任湘军总司令，并由省议会另选临时省长。赵恒惕在会上对谭延闿的求去没有挽留的表示，只声明不就总司令，愿以师长名义维持省会治安。

¹¹ Ibid., 4. Original: 貌合神离，同床异梦。

¹² Ibid. Original: 刚刚上台一个月，就认友为敌，悍然伸出了血手。

Jiaoren was killed in 1913 because Yuan Shikai wanted to maintain the presidency. At the same time, there are certain elements of Huang's recollections that are worth a second examination. First, Tan seems to hold a grudge against Huang and Zhao, but not Sun; he joined the KMT and became a close ally of Sun Yatsen shortly after his arrival in Shanghai. Given Sun's efforts to depose him, what accounts for this difference in reaction? Second, the bribe that Tan received from Zhao seems exceptionally high, especially given the ease with which he was removed from office. For context, the bribe to Wu Peifu, who commanded a much more dangerous military force, was merely six times as much. The two leaders would openly war with each other in 1923, so it is unclear how many times Huang's reported figure of 20,000 yuan every year was actually conveyed to Tan. It is unclear how wealthy Tan was in Shanghai, calling into question whether or not Huang is accurately describing these figures, or merely repeating rumors. Another account of his finances, this time by his grandson nearly a century later, notes that Tan raised 50,000 silver dollars to support Sun and the KMT by selling his house in Shanghai and asking for money from contacts in Changsha.¹³ This is not to say that the grandson's figures are more true, but rather to say that Huang's numbers, like many tales from the warlord era, are probably more exaggerations than reality.

Subsequent Histories of the Mutiny

When we look the historiography from fifty years later, it is clear that these exaggerations and embellishments about the mutiny and the warlord era have been uncritically incorporated into mainstream historiography. One example of this can be seen by in the text concerning these events found in *The History of the Republic of China, Volume 4* [中华民国史, 第四卷 (1920-1924)] by Wang Chaoguang, a member of the Institute of Modern History at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Wang's text, one of a 12-volume series published on the centenary of the 1911 revolution, was part of a larger "Republican Fever" trend in the People's Republic of China that aimed at reclaiming the era as a part of the CCP's own history.¹⁴ His interpretation of events largely follows the narrative outlined by Tao and Mao:

The activities of the Cheng faction caused Zhao Hengti, member of the strength party in the Hunan military, to secretly plot. Because of pressure from the Zhao and Cheng factions, Tan was forced to resign, and had no choice but to announce the continuation of government by the people and the abolition of the position of military governor. He also was forced to recommend Zhao Hengti for the position of Hunan military Commander in Chief. Tan had wanted to continue on as provincial governor, but was unable to secure the support of the Zhao and Cheng factions, and so could only leave Hunan for Shanghai in secret. Later, Zhao used strength to control the Cheng faction, and controlled the political situation to become ruler of Hunan.¹⁵

¹³ Chen Lu'an, "Forward."

¹⁴ Zhang Qiang and Robert Weatherley, "The Rise of "Republican Fever" in the PRC and the Implications for CCP Legitimacy," *China Information*, 27, no. 3 (2013), 3-26.

¹⁵ Wang Chaoguang 汪朝光, *中华民国史, 第四卷 (1920-1924)* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2011), 200-201. Original: "程派的举动, 得到湖南军人中的另一实力派赵恒惕的暗中纵容。谭延闿在程、赵两派的逼迫下, 不得不宣布 '还政于民, ' 废除督军, 推赵恒惕担任湘军总司令。谭延闿本来还想由自己担任省长, 但得不到程、赵

Here, Zhao is described as actively plotting his rise to power, and, along with Cheng Qian, his efforts are given the majority of the credit for why Tan leaves. In this, Tan's culpability is reduced significantly, as no mention is made of any mistakes or errors on his part; rather, he is "forced" [逼迫] into all of his actions.

What explains this reduction in blame of Tan? Wang's text might represent an effort by an official history to rehabilitate his reputation in order to appeal to the remnants and descendants of the KMT on Taiwan. In the decade after the mutiny, Tan would align himself with Sun Yatsen and rise high in the party bureaucracy as a relatively apolitical administrator before dying in 1930. This early death prevented him from being entangled in the factional disagreements between the left- and right-wings of the KMT and associated with the prominent corruption of the Nanjing decade. Regarding Hunan, the fact that he was apparently deposed by Zhao Hengti, who was an enemy of the young Mao, also makes him a figure who might be worthy of historical redemption. From this, it would seem as though Wang's text, like that of Tao's, is meant to serve contemporary political ends rather than academic ones.

The role of Cheng Qian, leader of a third faction of important military figures in 1920 Hunan, is minimized in this version of the narrative, perhaps because he was relatively removed from the action, or possibly because of his later celebrity immediately after 1949 as one of Hunan's most prominent political leaders. Cheng was not physically in Hunan in 1920: He had been forced to leave in disgrace after being exposed as negotiating with the hated Duan Qirui administration in Beijing. His loss of prestige for doing so is ironic, given the relationships between Beiyang militarist Wu Peifu with both Tan and Zhao that seemed to have no effect on their status. Yet there are no indications that he was actively directing his former subordinates in their opposition to both Tan and Zhao in 1920 and after, so his role in the mutiny warrants minimization. Another reason why he is given little blame for Tan's removal is because of his reputation with both the KMT and CCP: he was first a key general in the KMT military in the fight against the Japanese was promoted to Hunan provincial governor as a result. With the victory of the CCP imminent, he defecting to their side and gaining even more influence and power as a result.¹⁶

While one might expect a lack of objectivity and critical reflection from historians in the more politically-minded PRC, the same unfortunate tendencies can be seen in English-language histories as well. Angus W. McDonald Jr.'s 1978 study, *The Urban Origins of Rural Revolution: Elites and the Masses in Hunan Province, China, 1911-1927*, examines the roots of Chinese Communism's first failings there, as initiated by Mao Zedong. The book's overall argument focuses more on the communist shift in strategic focus from urban to rural areas, and McDonald builds upon Tao's interpretation of November 1920 to fit those events into his narrative. In this interpretation, Tan is not only a civilian, but also a member of the old conservative elite who are unable to understand the new methods of power in the post-1911

两派的支持，只能于 11 月 27 日黯然离湘赴沪。随后，赵恒惕以实力抑制程派，控制了局势，成为湖南的统治者。”

¹⁶ For more on Cheng Qian in English, see his entry in Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*. In Chinese, see Chen Xianchu, *Cheng Qian yu Jindai Zhongguo* 程潜与近代中国 (Changsha: Hunan University Press, 2004)

era. As a result, he was unable to lead the soldiers who are ostensibly loyal to him, which results in the following chain of events:

In early November a rebellion broke out in western Hunan under the leadership of the son of a former garrison commander determined to revenge his father's dismissal. As Tan's most trusted troops were engaged in putting out that distant fire, another broke out next door, in Pingjiang and Liling xians. Belatedly, Tan tried to secure again the support of Zhao Heng-ti, agreeing to turn over the military governorship while retaining the civilian post. But Zhao would have none of it. Tan Yan-kai slyly shipped 400,000 strings of copper cash to Shanghai to cushion his coming retirement. On November 23, as fighting broke out in the streets of Changsha, he fled aboard a river steamer. So hot was the breath of his enemies that, although his boat passed the funeral barge of his wife who had recently died in Shanghai, he could not pause long enough to attend her funeral in the hills above Changsha.¹⁷

In essence, McDonald is here agreeing with the narrative of military conspiracy. There is also a particular urgency to the story: Tan is not only chased out of Hunan, but must leave with such haste that he was unable to receive the body of his wife.

Edward A. McCord's 1995 examination of politics in Hunan and Hubei builds upon the Tao narrative even further, arguing that the replacement of the scholar Tan with the soldier Zhao was merely one example of a phenomenon that was happening all over China at this time. In this interpretation, civilian leaders like Tan routinely assumed that they could control military men like Zhao, but were consistently betrayed and ended up either dying or fleeing. This pattern epitomized the longer-term militarization of Chinese politics. Regarding Tan and Zhao specifically, McCord writes:

Ultimately, Tan's ability to maintain his position at the head of the Hunan government and carry out his political goals depended upon Zhao's continued support, and Tan soon found that Zhao's loyalty had limits... Tan had originally led Zhao to believe that he would yield the military governorship to him in return for his military support. Tan reneged on this understanding by retaining the military governorship and by announcing his plans to eliminate this office altogether. Although Tan awarded Zhao the vaguely defined title of 'general commander' (*zongzhui*), this was hardly adequate compensation... Because of the treatment Tan had shown him in the past, Zhao was indeed reluctant to come out in open opposition against Tan. There were other officers, though, who lacked this inhibition. In November 1920, a group of commanders formerly associated with Cheng Qian denounced Tan and began to march on Changsha. This gave Zhao a chance to reveal his own dissatisfaction without taking action against Tan himself. Instead of moving to block this military threat, Zhao stood aside. Without Zhao's support, Tan could not maintain his position. On November 23, 1920, therefore, just six months after his return to Changsha, Tan yielded control of Hunan's government to Zhao and left the province. Only then

¹⁷ McDonald, *Urban Origins*, 47.

did Zhao move to suppress the military revolt, in the process establishing his own authority.¹⁸

McCord uses this example to make an argument that political legitimacy during this period served merely as a function of military power. In this interpretation, loyalty came second to self-interest, with treachery practically expected by all. There may be positions like governor and commander, but real authority was rooted in might; Zhao does not seem to be placated by titles. According to these narratives, the political fragmentation of China during this period was thus a direct result of these amoral behaviors and the overarching supremacy of *wu* over *wen*.

McCord's framing of these events leaves some limited space for those networks and ideals that this chapter contends also played a role in the political culture of China's early republic. Since Tan was at least somewhat to blame for Zhao's disloyalty by renegeing on a promise to share the position of military governor, it could be argued that titles were also somehow or somewhat important to Zhao. Zhao was also unable to express "open opposition," instead letting others take the lead in calling for Tan's removal from office. If military power were the sole criteria for the exercise of power, then Zhao would presumably have no such compunctions, indicating a performative aspect to authority. It would seem important that Zhao at least appear to act in an acceptable way: he could be more easily criticized for acting in clear defiance of Tan, rather than neglecting to act in Tan's defense.

Yet, when reduced to its simplest form, McCord's position privileges a framework of military power and treachery over one of performed ideals, and fits within a larger historiography that does the same. This narrative of traitors is taken to its extreme by Stephen Platt, who frames the whole affair as a seizure of power. Platt contends that Zhao actively forced Tan out: "on November 24... Zhao Hengti seized control of the Hunanese military in a coup d'état and drove Tan from the province for a third and final time."¹⁹ Platt's book is more focused in intellectual continuities in Hunan from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, and less concerned with various relationships between specific elites, so Platt's distillation of a complex chain of events into one sentence can be forgiven for being over-simplified. What is more significant about this excerpt is that the idea that Zhao ousted Tan through military might seems cemented into Hunan's history; an idea that, as the next chapter will suggest, radically oversimplifies an otherwise complex history.

The Culpability of Tan Yankai in his own Downfall

Conventional and revisionist histories alike agree that the Pingjiang mutiny prompted Tan's resignation, jeopardizing his elite liberal regime and Hunan's prospects for constitutional autonomy, and threatening its replacement with a more conservative militarist administration. However, the underlying causes of the mutiny are a matter of fierce debate. Conventional interpretations generally attribute Tan's fall to his poor leadership of the province. Tao Juyin is one of these; he argues that Tan's fall was due to the following interrelated factors: he was a weak leader who did not enjoy the respect of the soldiers he supposedly commanded; he badly managed the province's internal rivalries, and his insincerity in relationships led to an

¹⁸ McCord, *Power of the Gun*, 301-2.

¹⁹ Platt, *Provincial Patriots*, 206-7.

atmosphere of suspicion that left him bereft of necessary alliances. Each of these factors is worth examining separately.

Tan Yankai was supposedly not well respected by the soldiers under his command. He was nicknamed “Granny Tan” (譚婆婆) for his gentle demeanor: not a moniker that any military leader would want. Not only was he indecisive, he also lacked moral courage, being easily intimidated by the threats of others. The point is further illustrated by depiction of a July 17, 1920 meeting for the province’s leaders that was held immediately after Zhang Jingyao’s departure and Tan assuming power. Tao describes attending this event in his capacity as the Changsha special correspondent for *Xinwen Bao* (新聞報), and the details he recounts in his memoirs of his early years as a journalist are worth repeating here.

Tao drew a stark contrast in the behavior and words expressed by Tan and Zhao upon assuming power. Tan spoke with tears running down his face, lamenting the fact that he had been unable to return sooner and save the province from Zhang. He “admitted his errors, asked for the brothers and sisters of Hunan to appropriately punish him, and credited the hard work of the Hunan Army for Zhang’s expulsion.”²⁰ In other words, Tan assumed the role of supplicant in relation to the soldiers and provincial leaders in the audience, in much the same way that emperors under the dynastic system would assume responsibility for major disasters under their leadership. In response, Zhao, who is sitting by his side, remarked, “This work was done through the leadership of I, Director General Zhao Hengti, as well as my officers and soldiers. What did [Tan] Yankai do?”²¹ At this weak apology and strong response, Tao and audience glanced at each other in tacit understanding, secretly admiring Zhao’s wit, eloquence, and modesty.²²

This exchange vividly captures the tensions between Tan and Zhao, and foreshadows the replacement of the former by the latter. Moreover, there is within the text a resonance with both the traditional tropes of traditional *wen* scholar-bureaucrats in opposition to *wu*-oriented soldiers as well as the contemporary ambitions of warlords to supplant and replace their supposed civilian superiors. On the other hand, Zhao is clearly an educated and sophisticated individual who is worthy of admiration, and might be worth considering as the successor to the feeble Tan, who seemed out of his depth. Indeed, the degree to which Tan begs for the public’s forgiveness comes off as simultaneously insincere and overly concerned about the opinions of others. Tao’s favor is clearly with Zhao over Tan.

That being said, the performative aspects of this encounter are worthy of scrutiny. Norms of behavior were rapidly changing over this time period, and the apparent conflict between Tan and Zhao noticed by Tao here might have been less about personal differences and more about differing ways that the two leaders were trying to exercise their authority. Tan was clearly evoking past tropes of leaders expressing empathy with the plight of their people, in the traditional *wen*-style of the past. Zhao’s seemingly callous remarks, on the other hand, might have been his way of trying to position himself as a soldier above all else, decisive and

²⁰ Tao Juyin, *Memoirs*, 38. Original: 延闈應向三湘父老兄弟諸姑姊妹請罪。諸公认为驱张战事，湘军劳苦功高。

²¹ Ibid. Original: 那是趙恆惕總指揮指揮若定之功，諸將士奮勇殺敵之功，延闈何功之有。

²² Ibid., 39. Original: 我們同行不禁互遞了一個眼色，暗佩此公口才敏捷，態度也夠謙虛。

direct. In this he might have been signaling his identity as a new-style militarist, free from the trappings of the old ways, and able to lead the province forward.

Performance aside, the dramatic and theatrical nature of this exchange presented by Tao comes off as exaggerated and false. It is hard to imagine Tan, who is described elsewhere as socially gifted, as being unable to understand Zhao's only slightly veiled insults. For his part, it is also hard to imagine Zhao making such a clear, if passive, challenge to Tan's authority in such a public setting, especially given how closely the two would work together for another five months. Finally, the idea that Tao and the others attending the meeting are surprised by the two leaders also strains credulity, as they had held authority for many months in the past, thus creating opportunities for an impression about to be formed well prior to this point. In sum, while there is no evidence to suggest that Tao is giving a false report about this meeting, it is still difficult to think of this exchange transpiring exactly as he says it did, if only because such a frayed relationship would not have been able to last another five months.

A similar skepticism should also be applied to Tao's characterization of Tan's appreciation for local conditions. A balance of power had existed in late Qing and early Republican Hunan that divided Hunan and the Hunanese into three regions: west, central, and south. Correspondingly, the three key figures in the alliance against Zhang Jingyao had been Tan, who was of the central region, Zhao Hengti, from Hengyang in the south, and Lin Zhiyu (1877-1930) from the west. Despite this careful balancing of power, the second charge against Tan is often his mismanagement of Hunan's internal rivalries; as the first chapter of this dissertation showed, Hunan is an extremely diverse place in terms of ethnicity and language, and so it could be difficult to coordinate a province-wide bureaucracy with multiple languages and potentially competing interests. Tao suggests that Tan tried to promote too many of his fellow central-region natives to senior posts, arousing the ire of those from the south and west regions, and prompting his own political downfall.²³

As with the previous example, Tao's characterization of Tan's does not fit with other descriptions of Tan as clever politician and manager of people. McCord, for example, notes that Tan was praised for his ability to balance allies and subordinates against each other. He writes:

One quality frequently attributed to Tan was *bamian linglong*, the ability to be pleasing to all parties... Tan's detractors saw this quality as simple political opportunism, and charged him with the manipulation of factions for his own ends. Irrespective of whether his sincerity was feigned, Tan used his personal skills to build and maintain a political consensus in support of his rule. In the end, one of Tan's main strengths as military governor was this ability to act as a political mediator among Hunan's various political forces.²⁴

In other words, Tan knew how to work with others and engender affection. While the situation described by Tao might merely be a case of those factions realizing the depths of his insincerity, it still seems strange that such an experienced administrator would make so basic an error as

²³ Ibid., 44. Chinese: 譚為一省軍民兩政之長，用人權最大，所用中路人最多，因此引起西南兩路人士的嚴重不滿。

²⁴ McCord, *The Power of the Gun*, 97-8.

not distributing power equally. Moreover, as a native of the province, would Tan truly have been so blind to the traditional division of power between the three regions?

For Tao, even Tan's effort to implement the popular election for Provincial Governor is little more than a transparent attempt to preserve his own power and keep Zhao and Lin in subordinate roles. When Zhang Jingyao left in July 1920, political and military power in Hunan were concentrated in three titles: Military Governor (督軍), Provincial Governor (省長) and Army Commander-in-Chief (總司令). Tan succeeded Zhao in all three positions, but promised to eventually yield the title of Army Commander-in-Chief to Zhao Hengti, who was Army Director-General (總指揮). As the months went by, his procrastination in following through on their agreement strained his relationship with Zhao, contributing to suspicions, along with his favoritism from those of Hunan's central region, that he aspired to monopolize power. While factors like the prestige of his family background, educational success under the Qing, previous tenure as governor, and connections to the local elite in Changsha empowered his authority, by 1920 military strength had become more important for securing political power. Since the majority of the senior officers in his army anticipated Zhao's eventual accession to the Commander-in-Chief title, and their own promotions to follow after that, Tan's broken promise thus induced the general resentment that led to his departure.²⁵

According to Tao, these forces came to a head during a key meeting between governmental, military, and civic leaders on November 23 in which Tan was forced to finally offer the Army Commander-in-Chief position to Zhao. News of the Pingjiang mutiny made Tan's position untenable, and he pled for Zhao's support and guarantee of protection. However, Tan was met only by silence. Tan broke down in tears just as he had in July, perhaps performing once again the traditional role of the leader taking responsibility and empathizing with his people. Tao describes this act as epitomizing the trope of the overwhelmed bureaucrat who is insufficiently strong to cope with his circumstances.²⁶ In other words, in Tao's narrative, tears symbolize *wen*-oriented weakness.

Tao's interpretation of Tan's behavior is that he refused to share power with others because of his own ambition, and realized all too late the fragility of his support. Because he had little to no military background, Tan could not expect to hold positions like Military Governor or Commander-in-Chief on a long-term basis. Therefore, he attempted to abolish these positions altogether through establishing popular elections. Though he used the excuse that civilian and *wen*-oriented rule was needed to preserve the peace, this was merely a transparent attempt to retain all power for himself. Similarly, Tao criticizes all of Tan's efforts to push for a provincial constitution and a federalist system of central-local relations again were motivated by his own personal ambition at its core. Not only was Tan trying to preserve his own authority, he was willing to split apart China to do so, very much like other separatist warlords who populate Tao's *Anecdotes*.²⁷

²⁵ Tao Juyin, *Anecdotes*, Vol. 2, 520-1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 527. Chinese: 他就情不自禁地哭起来。赵表示不就总司令，愿以师长名义维持省城秩序，但并不挽留谭。他谈到于应祥以部下而杀害长官，如果我们不能加以制裁，也应当自杀，说着，他也哭出声来。

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 522. Chinese: 这在表面上像是最彻底的一种“废督论”，但是，如果进一步加以观察，就不难看出这是谭延闿耍的一套手法，因为他自己是一个文人，当督军常被别人指责，如果实现这种主张，他在当选省长

Tao's negative assessment culminates in a critique of Tan as not only weak but also little more than an unintelligent puppet for others. As military and civil governor of Hunan, Tan is usually given credit for formulating and advocating for both federalism and the Hunan provincial constitution. However, Tao alleged that Tan did so only because the idea was suggested to him by Xiong Xiling and Liang Qichao, based on the close relationship the three of them shared as former members of the Reform Party during the last years of the Qing dynasty. Again, it is unclear where Tao drew this information; he makes a reference to a secret exchange of telegrams sent by Tan in Changsha to Xiong in Beijing, but he does not reveal how he learned of this communication. This stage of Tan's career is thus transformed from an episode that potentially demonstrates his progressive and original thinking to an example of his willingness to vacuously parrot others' ideas as if they were his own.

Tao is particularly scathing as he contrasted the support of Tan, Xiong, and Liang during this point in time to their erratic support for the same effort in the years prior. In line with the critiques made by Li Jiannong in *Political History*, the Reform Party to which these three belonged had firmly supported Yuan Shikai during his brief tenure as president, signaling an acceptance of centralized rule which cannot be easily reconciled with any later support for provincial constitutions and the decentralized national authority inherent in federalism immediately after Yuan's death. They changed position once more when key members from their circle were a part of Duan Qirui's cabinet, and shifted yet again after Duan's downfall. These dramatic shifts in loyalty, in Tao's analysis, were not due to true changes of opinion on these matters; rather, the three were shamelessly following whatever political trends seemed most beneficial to their own personal interests. This suggests, according to Tao, that they were solely concerned with worshipping power, and lacked a fixed political ideology.²⁸

For Tao, Tan's reluctance to support the beleaguered KMT in 1920 epitomizes his propensity to employ popular rhetoric to disguise his own quest for power. During his short third tenure at the apex of the Hunanese political and military systems, Sun Yat-sen and the KMT in Guangzhou were threatened by militarists from Guangxi. Even though he was ostensibly a loyal member of the party, Tan refused (according to Tao) to accept numerous requests from Sun and other KMT members to pledge Hunan's support for their cause. Many Hunanese KMT members came to Changsha from Shanghai to ask for Tan's support but he assumed the attitude of "respectfully keeping them at a distance."²⁹ Though his Hunan army could have easily launched a surprise attack on the Guangxi armies that were threatening Sun and the KMT in Guangdong, Tan remained neutral, instead attempting to initiate peace talks between the two sides under the auspices of provincial autonomy. Tao's characterization of Tan's motives is worth repeating in detail: he claims that in the various telegrams exchanged between Tan and the two sides in conflict discussing peace, Tan was still "peddling the political 'false goods' of provincial autonomy,"³⁰ implying that he was taking advantage of every opportunity possible to

以后，就可以在实质上做到省长兼督军，避免另有一个掌握军权的人和他分庭抗礼，更便于借口地方分权，维持他的地方割据。

²⁸ Tao, *Memoirs*, 39. Original: 他們一貫崇拜實力，在政治上毫無定見。

²⁹ Tao, *Anecdotes*, Vol. 2, 523. Original: 因此，属于国民党的湘籍旧国会议员李执中、周震麟、李汉丞、陈嘉祐等，均由上海回到湖南活动，但是谭延闿对他们采取了“敬而远之”的态度。

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Original: 从这个电报看得出，他在调解粤桂战争中，还在贩卖联省自治这个政治“私货”

push forward his separatist agenda. More interestingly, Tao notes that though Tan did issue numerous telegrams and circular telegrams for public consumption, there was at least one instance where an overeager KMT member drafted one on his behalf, without his permission, which then sparked a public exchange of declarations for and against the cause of provincial autonomy.³¹ In other words, his advocacy for ideals like these was merely to disguise his own secret thirst for power.

These are unfair attacks that deserve reconsideration. The overwhelming negativity that Tao uses to characterize Tan is without nuance, and it strains credulity to think that such an ineffective and feeble bookworm might be able to attain high office in his home province once, let alone three times. Moreover, his doing so during a time of political turmoil also strongly indicates his ability to win the respect of his peers and deserve the obedience, however partial, of his subordinates. By explaining his eventual failures with such extreme rhetoric, Tao makes it impossible to understand his initial successes. This not to say that Tao's interpretation is without value, but rather that his portrayal of events is so skewed that it cannot possibly be an accurate representation of the full story, and needs to be understood as such.

This leads to the question of how Tao has access to information about Tan's motives, especially given the public availability of editorials, circular telegrams, and other documents that purport to represent Tan's true position these matters. As before, sources for his information about Tan's motives are not given, intimating that his personal experience in Hunan and meetings with key figures during this time offers him a firsthand look that supports his argument. Yet it is somewhat hard to believe that Tao and Tan had the sort of close relationship that would enable the former to have significant insight into the personal character of the latter. Indeed, while there is no evidence that can challenge Tao's characterization of Tan and his motives, critical reflection on these episodes shows that there is little to support Tao's assertions. How would a 22-year old reporter be able to arrive at such a penetrating diagnosis of the forty-year old politician whom he did not know personally? Were there conversations between the two wherein Tan's true ambitions were revealed? Did he interview Tan, or perhaps even his subordinates for insight? In the absence of any supporting evidence, one must surmise that Tao reduced Tan to a cartoonish stereotype and had attributed Tan's intentions after the fact, in fulfillment of the overall argument he makes in *Anecdotes*. The cultural and generational gap between Tao and Tan was unable to be bridged.

Tan Yankai's Life in Exile

To a certain degree, Tao's criticism is understandable: Tan's unpublished English lesson books, recording his year immediately prior to the 1920 mutiny, seems to support the image of a frivolous and hedonistic elite.³² These texts constitute a chronicle of his daily activities from March 10, 1918, until May 31 of the following year, along with a record of his interactions and correspondence with others. Aside from his English instructor, who made corrections to Tan's spelling and grammar, there are no indications that others have read its contents, or that Tan himself intended for others to view these thoughts. In other words, these texts offer historians

³¹ Ibid., 524-5

³² Tan Yankai 譚延闓, 譚府存練習本 [Tan Yankai Exercise Books] in File "甲 726-29," Library of the Institute of Modern History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, People's Republic of China.

insight into a Tan Yankai that is neither filtered through the recollections of others, nor performed for the public in the same way his essays or circular telegrams might have been.

At first glance, the content of these exercise books might seem mundane. During this period of time, Tan traveled throughout South Hunan, waiting for the reign of Zhang Jingyao to end. While there, he began to study English; as a part of his lessons, he practiced writing by recording his daily activities and thoughts in a lesson book. Perhaps because his vocabulary was limited, the content within is repetitive and mundane. For example, his entry for March 13, 1919 mentions the following: “We arrived at the field, our horses run as fast as their legs could carry them about the field, which is about three hundred meters round and our horses could run once in about one minute. When we returned and took baths, how delightful we felt.”³³ Here, he faithfully describes his habit of riding and bathing not just because this is a record of his activities, but also because these are relatively simple words and sentences to write, befitting a student who is just beginning to learn the language. He might have easily engaged in more “serious” political activities like meeting with allies or gauging popular support for his administration, but such behaviors might not have been easily describable for a beginner in the language, and were therefore not recorded. In short, while it might be easy to think that Tan was interested in little else besides trivial matters like horses and bathing, this was not necessarily the case.

At the same time, the daily activities Tan describes in these materials also suggests how he might have been performing for his peers in a way that historians like Tao Juyin have overlooked. For example, even if the plethora of references to horses in these exercise books accurately reflected his daily schedule, and Tan devoted a high proportion of his time to riding and observing horses, this is better understood as an attempt to display his martial valor and capabilities on the part of Tan rather than the habits of an affluent man of leisure. The skill of using a horse in battle was a staple of nomad tribes from the steppe like the Manchu, it would have behooved Tan, who was struggling to attract and retain the loyalty of his soldiers, to appear to be an expert in this area. As described by Mark Elliot, riding was one of the key elements of the “Manchu Way” that was heavily promoted by the Qing imperial court for its bannermen, and, as such, surely retained a strong association with *wu* martial culture during the Warlord Period.³⁴ This is a point emphasized by Schillinger, who notes that “[h]orsemanship was viewed as one of the most sophisticated martial skill during the Qing and earlier dynasties, and horses often symbolized the military, *wu* masculinity, and imperial authority.”³⁵ Tan was also probably very aware of Zeng Guofan’s deficiencies in this area; he is described by Platt as being “physically inept and could barely ride a horse.”³⁶ Tan, being a classically trained scholar from Hunan who was attempting to transition into military leadership, was clearly attempting to imitate Zeng’s path to power, and so may have been attempting to supplement a shortcoming in his predecessor’s skillset.

An appreciation for horses might have also stemmed from his exposure to Western culture in Shanghai. Ning Jennifer Chang persuasively argues that the sport of horse racing was

³³ Ibid., March 13, 1919 entry.

³⁴ Eliot, *The Manchu Way* 8.

³⁵ Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity*, 148

³⁶ Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, 127

a “driving force behind the transformation of urban culture”³⁷ in treaty port metropolises like Shanghai, where Tan had spent some time after the failure of his first administration and 1913 arrest by the Beiyang central government. Tan’s affection for horses might thus have been a conscious performance to enhance his reputation as a cosmopolitan and sophisticated elite, well-versed in culture beyond Hunan and China. This interpretation parallels his new English lessons as well.

Banquets and feasting constituted another regular activity that Tan often recorded in his lesson book, contributing to his stereotyped portrayal as nothing more than a dilettante gourmand. His entry for April 30, 1919 is but one example of this: “In the evening, we made a great supper; this was to welcome Mr. Wang, who came from Changsha; the feast lasted till nine o’clock, because we conversated [sic] in pleasure, we almost forget the time.”³⁸ Yet while one interpretation of meals like these might see them as extravagant or wasteful, another layer worth noting is their utility as arenas for networking. Tan may have indulged in these feasts in order to maximize the time he could spend with his allies and would-be allies, thus maintaining and forming relationships.³⁹ The same might be said for Tan’s other activities with horses and bathing, which were also often communal and collective in practice.

A third item from his English-language exercise books also suggests how Tan was highly aware of broader political developments, defying the image of a disconnected and gentle intellectual. On December 31st, 1919, Tan describes talking with a friend who heard about turmoil within the Beiyang regime, and the death of a former leader. To this, he adds the following: “I wish that Tuen Che Hiu will follow to die.”⁴⁰ This Tuen is presumably Duan Qirui, whose domination of the national government was discussed in the previous chapter. The vitriol for Duan challenges previous portrayals of Tan as soft, gentle, and inoffensive. Whereas Tao and McCord had characterized him as a people-pleaser, this expression of hatred suggests surprising depths that are not affected or faked. Moreover, Tan’s familiarity with political developments in Beijing signals his preparedness to retake Hunan from the Duan-led Beiyang regime, showing that he has been patiently waiting for the appropriate moment to make his move, rather than merely puttering about with trivial affairs.

Thus, while these books might support the popular image of Tan as an indulgent elite, unconcerned with political realities, a closer examination suggests otherwise. He was clearly aware of the larger political landscape. He may have engaged in luxurious elite behaviors like horse racing and banqueting, but these also seem as though they were opportunities to extend his political influence via networks. The extravagant nature of these habits, however, also presage the gap between elites and masses that would eventually lead to his resignation.

³⁷ Ning Jennifer Chang, “To See and Be Seen: Horse Racing in Shanghai, 1848-1949,” in Toby Lincoln and Xu Tao, eds. *The Habitable City in China: Urban History in the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 91-112, 93.

³⁸ Tan Yankai, *Tan Yankai Exercise Books.*, April 30, 1919 entry.

³⁹ Mayfair Yang’s discussions of the value of banquets in contemporary China can easily be applied to the same communal and ritual consumption of food practiced by Tan. See Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 137-9

⁴⁰ Tan Yankai, *Tan Yankai Exercise Books*, December 31st, 1919 Entry.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the conventional narration of the 1920 mutiny and its role in prompting the resignation of Tan Yankai, arguing this interpretation of these events has been emphasized, embellished, and exaggerated to serve the tropes that undergird the dominant narrative of the “warlord era.” Tan is depicted as an indecisive scholar-bureaucrat, prone to tears during periods of stress, and unable to cope with the political turmoil around him: in short, exemplifying many of the negative stereotypes of his *wen*-style civilian predecessors. His chief military ally Zhao Hengti is the opposite: a *wu*-style soldier who betrayed his former superior in much the same way as Yuan Shikai betrayed the revolution.

The division between revolution and reform also plays a role in this drama, with the key players, whose elite backgrounds make them the targets of any revolution, implicitly scorned for the lack of revolutionary virtue and selflessness. The unified party-states of the KMT-led post-1927 Nanjing regime as well as the CCP-led post-1949 PRC regime both emphasize ideological rigor and altruistic behavior as defining features in their administrations; the infighting between Tan and Zhao serves to highlight the nadir of modern Chinese history from which the nation was saved.

The sources upon which this narrative has been constructed all have political motives in mind: using this historical example to comment on their contemporary moment. Should it be a surprise that a defector from the KMT to the CCP like Huang Yi’ou might critique Zhao, who had fled with Chiang Kaishek to Taiwan in 1949, with such venom? Or that Tao Juyin’s narrative, published in 1956, would resonate so closely with the ideological tenor of its time? The skewed history of the 1920 mutiny produced by these motives has continued to appear in recently published academic works in both Chinese and English, suggesting how the necessary critical perspective on this historiography has yet to be achieved.

Yet when a critical perspective is used to evaluate this mutiny, an alternative history emerges that is far more complicated and nuanced than the conventional narratives might otherwise claim. This history entails the persistence and continuation of traditional values and networks, even after years of political and military conflict, subverting depictions of the “warlord period” as wholly anarchical and amoral. Moreover, the unpublished exercise books offer up a different image of Tan that challenges conventional narratives: rather than seeing his daily activities as those of a dilettante, it is better to interpret this behavior as attempts to create an image of a vigorous and energetic leader. That being said, these were all elite habits that would prove to be poorly matched to the emerging mass politics of the era, foreshadowing the coming mutiny of common soldiers that would prompt his resignation in November 1920. While this chapter has focused mainly on reproducing and deconstructing the conventional of the mutiny and Tan’s resignation, the next chapter outlines an alternative interpretation that uses more unpublished materials like Tan’s diary and letters sent by Zhao immediately after 1920 to argue that this transition of power was less caused by rivalries among elites and more a product of contingent circumstances.

Chapter Five: Culture, Loyalty, and the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny

Introduction

The revisionist perspective on the Pingjiang Mutiny presented in this chapter aims to challenge the mainstream narrative of not only this event, but also, by extension, the larger 'Warlord Era' period that it supposedly exemplifies. The previous chapter demonstrated how political motives oversimplified how this event is remembered and depicted, emphasizing the chaotic and anarchical tenor of the period in contrast with the idealized stability of a centralized and ideological state. This chapter will juxtapose that narrative of the mutiny with an alternative interpretation arguing that elite factionalism had far less to do with this transition of power than a schism between leaders and disgruntled common soldiers. While internal strife did create the conditions that led to the mutiny, this was because of dissatisfaction among those who had served under Cheng Qian. The machinations of KMT emissaries from Guangzhou also seem to have played a role in fomenting the bad feelings. However, Zhao's culpability does not seem to be a cause: though he has been accused of conspiring against Tan to supplant him, this chapter demonstrates that this was not the case, in contrast to the conventional historiography. As with previous chapters, the arguments here are largely based on previously unused materials, like the diary of Tan Yankai and letters sent by Zhao Hengti, which have only recently become available. In making these specific claims concerning the Pingjiang mutiny, this chapter and dissertation show how motive and intent have been retroactively attributed to not only the major figures in local Hunanese politics, but also the broader sweep of modern Chinese history.

The chapter begins by examining the explanations for the mutiny presented by Li Jiannong in *Political History*, as well as those produced by contemporaneous texts like the major Changsha daily *Dagongbao* and the Tan Yankai diary. These latter materials demonstrate that, contrary to the portrayal given in *Anecdotes* and elsewhere, there was no open antagonism between the Zhao and Tan factions. The memories of observers like Zhong Boyi, Zhou Zhenlin, and Zhao Hengti himself also support a different narrative of the mutiny: instead of a *wu*-like general replacing a *wen*-like bureaucrat, symbolizing the decline of civilian rule and the rise of warlordism, the two leaders seem much more interchangeable. Letters sent by Zhao in the year afterwards to Tan also suggest how traditional mores and personal networks continued to play an important role in politics in the early Republic. These sources and narratives are infrequently referenced in the conventional history, perhaps because they add unwelcome complexity to an otherwise simple and elegant story. This is not to uncritically trust these sources over those discussed earlier, since the authors of these texts also had their own motives in writing them. Instead, this chapter highlights them as suggestions of a history that exist outside of the hegemonic narrative that has been imposed by both the state and the attendant culture.

The aim of this chapter is not to completely overturn the conventional narrative of the mutiny or the "warlord" period; there are no extant materials incontrovertibly proving, for example, that Tao Juyin was attempting to create a negative perception of the warlord era as a broken and dysfunctional time, or that Zhao Hengti was in his heart truly Tan Yankai's ally. Indeed, there is ample reason to think that the factional politics of the day positioned the two

ostensible allies against each other. Instead, challenging the dominance of the conventional perspective creates a space for alternative visions of this period that do not easily fit within a narrative of a traditional society in need of rescue by a revolutionary political party. This chapter thus suggests that Tan and Zhao shared a common culture of *wen*-like civility even after Tan's removal from power, challenging narratives that use the mutiny to illustrate the domination of *wu* over *wen*. Instead, the way that leaders responded to their subordinates and performed in culturally appropriate ways for their peers was more important, suggesting that *wen*-values retained a high degree of influence. Finally, this chapter argues that local political turmoil has been exaggerated in the conventional history, which has stressed the disintegration of local society as exemplifying the need for a strong central state. Tan Yankai may have poorly managed the political situation, but this does not indicate that Hunan was in complete disarray.

Political History and the 1920 Mutiny

To begin, it is worth reconsidering the narrative of the event put forth by Li Jiannong in *Political History*. As one might expect, his summary of this event is simple and concise, focusing mostly upon the details surrounding the creation and promulgation of Hunan's constitution, for which he gives Tan and Zhao much credit. Of the transition from one to the other, the English translation is as follows: "in November Tan was compelled by his own subordinates to leave the provincial capital. Chao Heng-t'i [Zhao Hengti] succeeded him as commander in chief,"¹ offering no other specifics. Li's statement is ambiguous: what was the nature of this compulsion? Did Tan do something to provoke this act? In the original text, Li is only slightly clearer. He writes, "In November, Tan, due to internal military morale, resigned, and Zhao Hengti became Hunan Army Commander-in-Chief."² While this difference in tone might seem slight, rereading the text in its original language emphasizes the bad morale among soldiers as the key factor behind Tan's departure, not some sort of coup on the part of Zhao as the English version implies. In the translation, Tan was compelled to leave, but in the original text, he resigns, though almost certainly not entirely of his own volition.

While the difference in meaning between the original text and its English translation are relatively slight, the political orientation of the text's two translators is well worth considering. One of these was Jeremy Ingalls (1911-2000), whose academic production was mainly in the field of literature so her motivations for framing Chinese history in any given way are relatively unclear. Though she is relatively unknown in the academic literature on modern Chinese history, the same cannot be said of her translation partner for *Political History*, Ssu-yu Teng [Deng Siyu] (1908-1988). Teng, a native of Hunan, was connected to a number of influential figures in the field of Western Sinology, working for Arthur Hummel in the compilation of *Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period*, and editing *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923* with John Fairbank. His impact on the emerging field was large, making his selection and translation of *Political History* an important one that shaped how other scholars would

¹ Li, *Political History*, 405.

² Li Jiannong 李劍農, 最近三十年中國政治史 [Thirty Years of Chinese Political History], (Shanghai: Taipingyang Shudian, 1930.), 465. Original: 到十一月譚氏因內部軍心不附去職趙恆惕繼任湘軍總司令。

conceptualize and teach the period. Moreover, Teng's international reputation meant that his selection of this text raised its profile and influence in China as well.³

What was the political orientation of Ingalls and Teng, and did this influence their understanding of the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny? In their introduction to *Political History*, they write that Li's views were "free from both partisan propaganda and undocumented speculation,"⁴ Given the strong bias in the text against reform-oriented change and towards a revolution-centered view of modern Chinese history that was previously discussed in chapter two, this seems slightly disingenuous. Perhaps their agreement with his framing of these concepts meant that they were prone to understand his portrayal as objective; this would suggest their favoritism for the KMT, and inform their choice to emphasize the general political chaos in Hunan as causing the mutiny, rather than blaming Tan Yankai or Zhao Hengti. Moreover, Ingalls, in a posthumous volume analyzing the poetry of Mao Zedong, evinces an anti-CCP sentiment as well: according to one reviewer, she attributes "sinister" motives to his writing to an "absurd" degree, suggesting support for the KMT party-state to which Tan and Zhao would later belong.⁵

Li Jiannong may have shared this perspective, and his own experience with the key figures of the mutiny surely informed his perspectives on framing this event. By November 1920 he had become a professor at Mingde University, in the nearby Wuhan area, for about a year. While there are no indications that he could have been physically present in Changsha during this time, he would temporarily leave his academic position to chair the committee entrusted by Zhao Hengti with the composition and promulgation of the Hunan Provincial Constitution. This document was something of a mixed success, since its authority and power, like the national constitutions before it, did not seem to cause any restraining effect on the state. Nevertheless, Zhao went on to offer Li the position of provincial education bureau director. As Hunan's senior bureaucrat, Li would also be Zhao's *de facto* civilian chief of staff, responsible for the implementation of domestic non-military policy. Li left public life in 1925 for unknown reasons and returned to teaching and writing essays.⁶ On the one hand, his employment under Zhao must have affected his assessment of the mutiny, as he might have been unwilling to critique the governor with whom he had been closely associated, perhaps making the brief description of the 1920 mutiny notable for what it does not say and for who it does not blame. Conversely, however, Li would have surely known all of the key figures involved, thus adding weight to his claims as a counterpoint to those more conspiracy-minded narratives by authors like Tao Juyin or Huang Yi'ou.

Beyond his personal connection to the persons involved, the context in which *Political History* was published must also have influenced his perspective. By 1930, ten years after the mutiny, Sun Yatsen had died and Chiang Kaishek had led the KMT to power through the Northern Expedition that militarily unified much of the nation behind his party-state rule. Tan's ties to the KMT, once tenuous, had become far closer, and he had served in high-ranking

³ For more on Deng, see Chen Runcheng, "Deng Siyu [Teng Ssu-yu] and the Development of American Sinology After World War II," in *Chinese Studies in History*, Vol. 41, No. 1. (Fall 2007), 3-40.

⁴ Ssu-yu Teng and Jeremy Ingalls, "Forward" in Li, *Political History*, v.

⁵ Paul Manfredi, "Dragon in Ambush: The Art of War in the Poems of Mao Zedong By Jeremy Ingalls," MCLC Resource Center Publication (October, 2015), <http://u.osu.edu/mclc/book-reviews/manfredi/>.

⁶ Hua Chu "Li Jiannong," 61-65.

positions like Party Chairman and Premier of the Executive Yuan. Given his position, as well as his apparent proclivity for blocking the advance of those, like Huang or Zhao, who may have attacked him in the past, it would be understandable for Li to shy away from critical language about Tan and his embarrassing exile from Hunan. In other words, just as the political circumstances in which he was writing informed Tao Juyin's *Anecdotes*, the context within which *Political History* was written and translated also needs to be considered.

Local Newspaper Reports

Since retroactive narratives of these past events seem overly freighted with contemporary political meaning, consulting texts like newspaper articles that were written at the time of the incident avoids this problem; however, doing so only reveals how little journalists seem to know. Though it might be expected that a local newspaper like *Dagongbao* (大公報) would offer historians a coherent picture of the chain of events that led to Tan's departure, this is not the case. Founded in 1915, *Dagongbao* is one of the only periodicals published in Changsha to survive to the present day; many of the other dailies or weeklies are no longer extant. Also known by the English moniker *L'Impartial*, and not to be confused with an identically named periodical first published in Tianjin that continues to this day in Hong Kong under the name *Ta Kung Pao*, the tone of the newspaper was relatively objective, though perhaps, as noted by Edward McCord, slightly in favor of Tan Yankai. It was the most widely circulated local daily in Changsha.⁷

The basic chronology of events leading to Tan's removal as written in *Dagongbao* is given in a disjointed and confusing way, suggesting that those responsible for producing these articles are themselves unsure as to what has happened; reconstructing the events of the mutiny using only the newspaper accounts would be difficult. In the first mention of any trouble, an article from November 17 titled "Appalling News About an Unforeseen Event in Pingjiang" (平江發生變故之駭聞) mentions the rumor that District 12 commander Xiao Changchi had experienced an unexpected incident in Pingjiang county on the 13th of that same month. This was all according to a letter received the night before, and because there was still no telegraph line set up between Changsha and Pingjiang, it was difficult to confirm the accuracy of the report. The article reproduces the content of the letter, but prefaces it by saying by saying that it was "difficult to understand" (似通非通), expressing doubt about its veracity. The letter itself describes the tense atmosphere in Pingjiang, and the rumor that Xiao had been captured by soldiers (被兵士捉了) who complained about not being paid what they deserved. It was clear that something had happened, but there was no way of discerning truth from mere gossip, and there was no sense that this event was in any way linked to discontent with Tan's rule.⁸

On the 20th, three days later, a fuller account of the incident was published in the same publication making it clear that a mutiny had occurred, but again not connecting its causes to anything related to Tan or Zhao. In an article titled "News About the Aftermath of the Pingjiang

⁷ Edward A. McCord, "Cries That Shake the Earth: Military Atrocities and Popular Protests in Warlord China," *Modern China* 31, No. 1 (Jan. 2005), 3-34, 5-9.

⁸ *Dagongbao* 大公報 (November 17, 1920). Reprints of this periodical's 1917-1927 issues were produced by Xi'an Peoples' Press in 1980 and are available in many North American academic libraries with a significant East Asian collection, like University of California, Berkeley, Princeton University, or Yale University.

Mutiny” (平江兵變後之消息) that begins with the phrase, “Different people offer different accounts” (言人人殊) to caution the reader that perhaps this was only one version of the mutiny, the author describes multiple versions of Commander Xiao’s death, according to the various rumors that were circulating. In one, he was shot by rebellious soldiers; in another, he hung himself after being captured; in yet another he was killed trying to escape. The leader of the mutiny is identified as Yu Yingxiang, and two officers dispatched from Changsha were able to confirm only this fact. Little else is said, no sources are given for this information, and what happens next is unclear.⁹ The information given in these two articles largely matches with the names and dates given by Yao Daci and Huang Yi’ou in their oral histories.

However, articles published the next two days complicate the narrative of Huang and Yao somewhat. On November 21st, an article titled “Zhao Refuses Post of Commander-in-Chief,” (趙師長力辭總司令) reports that Tan attempted to transfer his post to Zhao, but was rebuffed. The article also reproduces a circular telegram sent by Tan to the various commanders and officials of Hunan recommending that Zhao be elevated to that position. The purpose is so that Zhao can oversee military affairs and Tan can concentrate on civilian matters. On that same day, a telegram was reprinted on the same page in which the other military commanders throughout Hunan supported this transition, apparently for the good of the “homeland” (桑梓), but it still seems as though Zhao was unwilling to take command.¹⁰ This article is most likely describing the first attempt by Tan to surrender the leadership of Hunan’s military wholly to Zhao on the 18th. However, Huang’s oral history explicitly claimed that “few knew about the content of this meeting,” and that he himself was only able to learn about what had happened after the fact.¹¹ How could this information be unknown by many if it was also in the daily newspaper? This strongly suggests that Huang was either misrepresenting or misremembering the level of secrecy associated with this first meeting, or that those involved might be talking to reporters in order to present ostensibly confidential information into the public sphere. The reason for doing so might be to increase the pressure on Tan to surrender influence in a more sincere way, or to provoke Zhao into accepting that same offer.

This latter possibility seems more probable because of a report on the 22nd titled “The True Attitude of Tan and Zhao” (譚趙之真實態度), wherein Tan is described as wanting to only surrender his title of commander-in-chief while retaining the governorship for himself. Moreover, as the author points out, Tan’s simultaneous advocacy for popular elections meant that whoever takes the position would only be doing so for a short while before he could possibly be forced to leave office by the will of the people, making Tan’s ostensible desire to step down seem highly suspect (總之無論如人 當總司令省長。已即退居公民地位).¹² Because the author takes a very anti-Tan tone and expresses suspicion about his genuine willingness to share power, it would seem as though these news articles are being used to advance Zhao’s position as leader of the province, possibly challenging McCord’s characterization of the publication as being slightly biased towards Tan.

⁹ Ibid., (November 20, 1920).

¹⁰ Ibid., (November 21, 1920).

¹¹ Huang Yi’ou, “Memories,” Original: 这次会议内容，外间知道的人很少

¹² *Dagongbao* (November 22, 1920).

Even beyond the possible bias towards Zhao on the part of *Dagongbao*, these newspaper articles concerning the November 1920 mutiny in Pingjiang demonstrate the questionable reliability of information during this time. Given the fact that Tao Juyin, one of the key authors of the conventional warlord period narrative, was himself a journalist, this illustration of how little those in this profession seemed to know is worth emphasizing. Pingjiang county is located to the northeast of Changsha, roughly 120 kilometers away, so the fact that newspapers do not hear of a major incident like a mutiny for four days indicates how slowly information traveled within the province. According to these *Dagongbao* articles, though the mutiny occurred on the 13th, this information did not reach the newspaper until the 17th, with a fuller picture needing to wait until the 20th. Moreover, it is unclear how they might know about the motives of the people involved, how the incident could possibly lead to Tan's flight, and why Zhao might have refused the position of Army Commander in Chief. Was the offer from Tan Yankai genuine? Was the refusal merely a polite show of modesty to avoid the perception that he was ambitious? Are there any indications that Zhao coordinated the mutiny in order to be offered the very position that he refused on that day? The journalists writing these *Dagongbao* articles did not address these questions, perhaps because it was not within the purview of their genre to do so; what is more complicated is that others, as we have seen, did not shy away from projecting motives onto these historical actors.

The journalists' inability to address the motives of the key figures involved, combined with their lack of basic information, is worthy of reflection when considering how later historians impute cause and effect to their subjects. Those writing these articles presumably have far greater access to the key figures in these events than those who wrote decades later, yet they were unable to discern or identify why events unfold as they do. Their silence on these matters should provoke critical readers to be wary of any attempts to attach meaning or motive to these events. Moreover, the journalistic profession during the early Republican period of Chinese history was not held in high regard, as journalists were known to support a particular political patron or faction, blackmail people, and freely make up stories. The situation was such that major publishers and contemporary observers advocated for the construction of formal educational institutions for training young journalists and establishing standards of conduct, suggesting the low quality and unreliability of their industry during this era.¹³

Finally, the journalists and news editors had their own motives in crafting particular narratives: they wanted to attract as many readers as possible. While the urgency to entertain readers does not necessarily mean that they had overt political motives, they attracted customers by claiming that the stories they were relating were "true" (真实), as in the title of the article from November 22nd, even if there might be exaggeration for dramatic effect. Again, this aspect of the newspaper industry and its effect on historical narrative is worth considering in light of the former journalist Tao Juyin's immense influence on the how the period is remembered. What is needed, therefore, would seem to be a contemporaneous account of

¹³ For more on these phenomena, see Stephen R. MacKinnon, "Toward a History of the Press in the Republican Period," in *Modern China* Vol. 23, No. 1, (Jan., 1997), 3-32 and Timothy Weston, "Journalism as a Field of Knowledge in Republican China," in Robert Culp, Eddy U, and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *Knowledge Acts in Modern China: Ideas, Institutions, and Identities*, (Berkeley, CA.: Institute for East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2016), 246-271.

these events that is written by an individual with firsthand knowledge. The diary of Tan Yankai, at first glance, might serve this role.

The Diary of Tan Yankai

Tan Yankai was a political figure liked by his peers but who remained aloof and disinterested from the politics in which he was embedded; similarly, his diary maintains the same detached tone, offering little insight into his own motives and few judgments of those around him, thus duplicating the manner in which many perceived him. It was scanned, edited, and digitally published in 2011 by the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taiwan; it has since been published in 2019 by Zhonghua press in the People's Republic of China.¹⁴ Its main utility comes as way to track the interactions of individual figures, and verify facts that described in other sources.

The diary largely supports the chronology of events found in *Dagongbao*, but with a few differences that speak to the difficulties in acquiring accurate information during this period of time. *Dagongbao* first reported rumors of a disturbance in Pingjiang on November 17th, suggests that they first heard the news the day before; Tan's entry for that day suggests he heard similar information on the same day, but in greater detail. He wrote:

At 11, I received a phone call from Luman. I returned home after the call. He said, according to a person coming from Pingjiang, there was a mutiny on the 14th, and Songjian (Xiao Changchi) was captured, with Yu Yingxiang declaring himself as commander... After dinner I received a message saying that Songjian (Xiao) was dead, which upset me greatly.¹⁵

It would seem as though Tan heard the rumors of the Pingjiang mutiny at about the same time as *Dagongbao*, though he had a much clearer picture as to the severity of what had happened. His entry for the next day shows his awareness of the purpose behind of the mutiny at a very early point in time, far ahead of *Dagongbao*:

At 5pm, Taiyan (Zhang Binglin) arrived, and was scheduled to give a lecture at the Hunan military and civil sections. We took in some sights together, and had a farewell banquet, where he gave a speech. He left tonight. After he left, I heard a report that soldiers and officers were planning to mount a sneak attack tonight and calling it the "Anti-Tan" movement. My hardships are year in/year out; did I ever plan (scheme) for my own benefit? My situation requires no support, nor does it await someone to topple it. If there is someone who can be entrusted with all of this, it would be a great relief for me to be freed of these burdens I bear like shackles.¹⁶

¹⁴ These diary entries were originally accessed electronically in 2011 at the Kuo Ting-i library of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. They have recently been published as well: see Tan Yankai 譚延闓, 譚延闓日記 [*Tan Yankai Diary*], 20 Vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2019).

¹⁵ Tan Yankai Diary 譚延闓日記, November 16, 1920: 至十一時, 得呂滿電話, 乃歸, 則平江人來, 知十四早兵變, 松堅被執, 于應祥稱司令。。。晚餐後得信, 松堅死矣, 為之傷感不已。

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, November 17, 1920: “五時, 章太炎來, 約在省軍政署, 同撮景, 餞飲, 起演說。太炎今夜行也。客去, 得報告, 有兵將來襲, 以倒譚為名。吾辛苦頻年, 豈為身計, 本不須扶, 何待人倒。但令有可授受,

Tan did not seem to have taken the mutiny seriously until this point: instead of devoting himself to managing the crisis or fleeing Changsha, he entertained the nationally prominent intellectual Zhang Binglin (章炳麟, 1868-1936) who was visiting to lecture on the subjects of the Hunan constitution, federalism, and the larger provincial autonomy movement. At the same time, Tan vividly expressed the pressure he felt, practically begging to be relieved of his responsibilities in language that foreshadows his resignation at the end of the month. It was a common trope to assert that power was undesired and therefore a burdensome responsibility thrust upon politicians; even the Generalissimo Chiang Kaishek made a show of stepping down many times. Likewise, Tan could have been signaling to posterity that he was not power-hungry. Nevertheless, placing these statements in the context of entertaining Zhang indicated Tan's inherent preference for the scholarly aspects of civil governance rather than responding quickly to a military situation. His apparent reluctance for power and leadership supports the historical stereotype of the hapless scholar who could not take decisive action, or the trope of the naïve civilian bureaucrat who is outmaneuvered by a conspiracy of bloody-minded militarists. This is not to say that the diary is a wholly accurate reflection of Tan's state of mind, as he was clearly writing for a future audience. Rather, highlighting this lament emphasizes the way in which Tan felt the need to perform and act in an appropriate manner, in line with traditional norms of behavior.

At the same time, some of the discrepancies between the narrative given in the diary and that given by other sources are too disparate to be attributed to human error. In the next diary entry, for November 18, Tan wrote:

The senior officials gathered and decided to announce the dissolution of the military governor [督軍] position and divide the responsibility for civil and military matters. We will ask Yiwu [Zhao Hengti] to become the commander-in-chief, and have Tesheng [Lin Zhiyu] be governor. I spoke at some length and received much support. So it was successfully decided.¹⁷

The meeting described here is chronologically similar to that found in the Huang Yi'ou oral history as well as the *Dagongbao* article from November 21st, yet the content seems completely different. These texts claimed that Zhao had refused Tan's offer, while this diary entry describes the exact opposite. Though both Tan as well as Huang and *Dagongbao* might have their own particular motives for misrepresenting what had happened, it is far more likely that the diary, being the contemporaneous record of someone who was present at the meeting, offers a more accurate reflection of the decisions made on this date than that those given by authors who were not even present. Again, this is not to say that this depiction should be uncritically accepted at face value, as Tan might have certainly been writing his diary with an eye towards future perceptions of these events. Indeed, Tan's attitude towards surrendering power here seems disingenuous at best, without any bitterness or resentment about being forced by the mutiny to make the offer. Moreover, as noted by the *Dagongbao* journalist, his efforts to

去此如桎梏耳”

¹⁷ Ibid., November 18, 1920: “各高級官均集，乃宣布廢督軍民分治宗旨，請夷午任總司令，以省長讓特生，發言甚久，諸君皆贊成，遂定局。”

separate military might from civilian administration, institute popular elections, and surrender some power to Zhao all seemed to be at cross-purposes. The timing of all three makes it easy to suspect Tan of merely attempting to offer Zhao the highest military office as a temporary stopgap measure that was aimed at the preservation of his own position as an official elected by the general populace. As with Tao's possible propensity to exaggerate and strengthen his narrative of a chaotic era, Tan might be misrepresenting these aspects of this meeting so as to make his own decisions appear in the best possible light.

Tan's diary entries for the next two days continue to create a narrative of events that challenges that given by the other texts, in that his relationship with Zhao is portrayed as one between peers and companions, far from the image of antagonism and rivalry seen elsewhere. On the 19th, Tan wrote,

Yiwu [Zhao] came over to say a few things, and we went together to watch the horses outside. The horses ridden by Mingqiu and Fang Boxiong that were bought and brought over from Japan were not of excellent caliber, but only ordinary. We went back inside and spoke for a long time. We spoke honestly and openly. There is nothing to conceal between us. The only thing is that it is hard to explain one's feelings to others.¹⁸

Though the Zhao-Tan relationship described here might not be warm or intimate, but it still seems affable in contrast to other depictions. For Tao Juyin, for example, Zhao seems to be overpowering and intimidating Tan; in contrast, the diary suggests that they are equals who often discussed difficult issues in a straightforward manner. There does seem to be a hint of strain between the two, with Tan emphasizing the difficulty in achieving true candor and guilelessness, but not to the degree found in the open completion given by the conventional narrative, wherein Zhao pushed Tan aside. Indeed, in his diary entry for the next few days, Tan writes that it is others who were urging him to leave, with Zhao's name conspicuously absent. On November 20th, he wrote that Zou Xubin (1883-1943) argued that staying in Hunan is unwise: "Tiansan [Zou Xubin] again consulted for a long time: for my sake, I should leave as quickly as possible; for the sake of Hunan, I should not leave; for the sake of my friends, I should stay; from a realistic perspective, I should go."¹⁹ Here, Zou appeared to be stipulating that Hunan would be better with Tan present, but that because this was impractical, and that Tan's personal safety was at risk, he should leave. Similarly, during the crucial meeting on November 23rd in which Tan made the final decision to leave for Shanghai, Zhao is not described as having precipitated his departure, through any act or word of encouragement. Instead, the diary describes Lin Zhiyu, who would take over the civilian side of Hunan governance, as "presenting reasons [for Tan] to leave, thus revealing his true feelings on the subject."²⁰ Thus, according to the diary, Zhao does not seem to be among Tan's betrayers at all; given how he does not seem reticent about naming Lin Zhiyu as a person who encourages him to leave, it does not seem

¹⁸ Ibid., November 19, 1920: "夷午來言事，與同看馬門外。明秋及方伯雄騎之馬為日本買來者，不甚駿，普通洋馬耳。入室，談久之，意至誠懇，吾輩無不可相見，以心特難為人言耳。"

¹⁹ Ibid., November 20, 1920: "天三復久談，為吾計，以速去為妙。為湘計，以不去為妙。為朋友計，以留為宜。為事實計，以去為宜。"

²⁰ Ibid., November 23, 1920: "次言辭職理由，後表明心迹。"

plausible for Tan to neglect to mention Zhao doing the same thing. While Tan was forced to leave because of an implicit and explicit lack of support, it does not seem as though he believes Zhao to be an instigator of this phenomenon.

In short, Tan Yankai's diaries from November challenge the conventional narrative of betrayal on the part of Zhao Hengti. The relationship between the two appears tense at worst; there are no connotations or undertones of suspicion or distrust. Furthermore, though Tan was critiqued for being overly concerned with frivolous matters like watching horses or entertaining guests, his diary entries suggest a greater awareness of his political situation than has previously been described. His efforts to interact and form relationships with those around him should not be interpreted as a fascination with trivial matters, but rather his successful attempt to ingratiate himself with his peers. In light of these maneuverings, his claims to being overly burdened by the responsibility of his office seem disingenuous and performative: Tan was just as ambitious as his more military-oriented counterparts, making every effort to extend his influence and gain power during this time of political turmoil.

Exonerations of Zhao

Other oral histories support Tan's assertion of Zhao's innocence. Zhong Boyi was another major political figure in Hunan during this time who was closely linked to both Tan and Zhao: Tan Yankai's diary frequently mentions meeting Zhong to talk; Zhong would later become the head of the provincial finance bureau under Zhao's administration. A member of the KMT who fled to Taiwan after 1949, he had particular motivation to frame the actions of Zhao and Tan in the best possible way. As a result, and perhaps unsurprisingly, he blamed Li Zhonglin for the mutiny, and described what he perceived to be the reasons for why the mutiny led to Tan's flight to Shanghai. According to Zhong, in November of 1920,

Tan Yankai replaced Jiangdao garrison commander Liu Menglong, who belonged to the Cheng faction. In this military reorganization, Liu's unit was made the 12th garrison, stationed in Pingjiang; Tan ordered Liu's garrison vice commander Xiao Changchi to take over. Soldiers from this unit began to stir up trouble in the name of salaries. They viciously killed Xiao and declared Yu Yingxiang as their commander. This was all at the instigation of Li Zhonglin. When the news reached Changsha, Tan felt as though it was very difficult to handle these affairs, and so called for an emergency meeting where the key military and civil figures of the province were gathered. I attended as an observer. Third-division commander Lu Diping gave an impromptu speech "The Commander-in-Chief should withdraw to take a break for a time." (Afterwards, Lu actually became Zu'an's (Tan's) trusted subordinate and right-hand man; personal relations are truly hard to understand!) Zhao Hengti (Yanwu) proclaimed that he would not take sides in a conflict between Tan and Cheng.²¹

²¹ Zhong, *Interviews*, 88: "譚延闓撤換程派將領江道區司令劉夢龍，改編該部為第十二區守備隊，駐平江，命其副官長蕭昌熾出任該區守備隊司令，該部士兵以鬧餉為名，衝進司令部將蕭殺害，推營長于應祥為代理司令，此事即為李仲麟主使。消息傳至長沙，譚氏極感難以處置，乃召集緊急會議，在省之軍事首長與重要文職人員均出席，余亦應邀列席。第三旅旅長魯滌平竟即席表示 [總司令稍事休息一段時期]，（以後魯竟成組庵之親信股肱，人事離合誠難逆料。）趙恆惕（炎午）則表示對於譚、程之事不作左右袒。"

This passage gives further context to why Xiao's men betrayed and killed him; they were never truly his subordinates. Tan Yankai had removed Liu Menglong and elevated Xiao in an effort to strengthen his control over the area, which was garrisoned by former soldiers of Cheng Qian. In replacing one of Cheng's former subordinates with his own loyalist, Tan's overextended himself, provoking the mutiny, and causing Xiao's death. In Zhong's version, complaints about salaries were only a pretext that the dissatisfied soldiers used to stage their mutiny. Zhao thus seems to be a neutral party in a conflict between the Tan and Cheng factions, and the connection between the mutiny and Tan's departure is clear: there were doubts among some of his subordinates regarding his ability to lead that were only brought into the open at the meeting on November 18th discussing the Pingjiang mutiny. Without the confidence of the men he was ostensibly leading, Tan had no choice but to resign and flee to Shanghai. Li Zhonglin, and, by extension, other former subordinates of Cheng Qian, are given the majority of blame, with Zhao exculpated from all complicity. Moreover, in Zhong's telling, not only does Zhao seem to be blameless, but the issue of military pay is what was driving the mutiny. This was almost certainly related to Tan's efforts during prior administrations to reduce military expenditures by disbanding troops, as these soldiers clearly had an expectation concerning their pay that they felt Tan would not meet.

Zhong's description of these events supports the conventional warlord narrative, but only to a point, as the concerns of common soldiers seemed far more important than the rivalries between commanders. Tao's *Anecdotes* emphasized the manner in which military leaders warred with each other, both overtly and covertly, with the conspiracy surrounding the mutiny being a prime example of these acts. This competition was only later eliminated by the centralizing state. Zhong also portrays an environment of chaos, but he does not blame Zhao, instead attributing the chaos to material concerns over salary as well as Tan's promotion of Xiao Changchi over soldiers in Pingjiang who had been loyal to Cheng Qian.

Zhou Zhenlin's oral history of the era constructs yet another explanation of events, in which Zhao appears innocent once again. Zhou (1875-1960) was also a member of the KMT like Zhong, but chose to join the CCP later on like Huang Yi'ou. His exoneration of Zhao is convincing because he characterizes himself as a participant in the anti-Tan conspiracy, and would thus know whether or not Zhao had been directly involved. According to him,

In August of 1920, upon hearing of the Fujian and Guangdong armies' actions, Tan Yankai still reacted with indifference, and asked people like Wu Jingheng and Zhang Taiyan to come to Hunan to lecture, see the sights, and enjoy wine and food. He ignored Sun Yatsen's plans for a Northern Expedition. I urged him to send troops early, and spoke much, but he was still indecisive. As a result, I joined officers of the Hunan military in their Anti-Tan movement. We decided as a group that Zhao Hengti should be Commander in Chief and Lin Zhiyu should be Provincial Governor. At that time, Zhang Zhenwu killed Xiao Changchi, who would not go along with our plans, which forced the soldiers under Third Division commander Liao Jiadong to enter the provincial capital. I judged that the time to overthrow Tan had arrived, and entrusted Chen Jiahui, a member of the protect-the-Constitution congress to persuade Tan Yankai to leave Hunan voluntarily. Tan called me to pitifully plead for more time to bury his wife, who had died in

Shanghai, and whose coffin was on the way to Hunan at that moment. After which he would go. I answered him, "For the sake of preserving social order in Changsha, and for your safety, you should leave immediately. Regarding your wife's funeral, I will soon go to Shanghai to apologize to you directly." He could only board the boat and go back to Shanghai... Unexpectedly, when I reported back to Guangzhou, Zhao Hengti broke faith with those in Changsha, massacred Li Zhonglin and the others, and became again an obstacle to Sun Yatsen's Northern Expedition.²²

In this narrative, Zhao Hengti is not blamed in the least for what happened in November 1920, and questions of pay for soldiers does not seem to be a factor. Instead, KMT influence, in the form of Zhou Zhenlin, seems to be the major reason why the mutiny took place, with Xiao being murdered because he did not wish to move against Tan. Zhou identifies himself as the key individual who persuaded Tan to leave voluntarily for Shanghai, in stark contrast to those narratives claiming Zhao forced Tan out, and in contradiction to the newspaper articles claiming that the concerns over salary had motivated the mutiny. If Zhao were somehow involved, it seems inconceivable that Zhou would not so identify him, especially given his critique of Zhao's later action. Indeed, there is no motive for him to leave Zhao out of his narrative; as a former KMT member who had defected to the CCP, it would behoove Zhou to imitate Mao and critique Zhao for his role. Instead, Zhou emphasizes Tan's carousing with his elite intellectual friends and his apathy for the broader national picture: two aspects of Tan's stereotyped behavior that were addressed in the previous chapter's examination of his unpublished English language exercise books. Moreover, Zhou here claims that he and other KMT members had deliberately created discord between the various political factions, which is not something that has been previously described in the literature. Hunan's geostrategic importance emerges once more, as the central location of the province made it a key target for KMT agents.

The oral histories by Zhong and Zhou convincingly support the idea that Zhao Hengti was not an active participant in the effort to remove Tan Yankai from power. They also make the claim that material considerations like pay were secondary to factionalism in motivating the mutiny, but that Zhao was not an active participant in this factionalism. Those like Mao or Tao who argue that Zhao was a traitor of some sort have motives for doing so: Tao Juyin to emphasize the chaos of disunity during the warlord period; Mao to critique the warlord who suppressed communism in Hunan. Materials from those who do and do not share those motives suggests otherwise. It is clear that disunity and political turmoil existed in Hunan, in

²² Zhou Zhenlin 周震麟. "谭延闿统治湖南始末 [The Whole Story of Tan Yankai's Control of Hunan]," in 湖南文史资料选辑 [Selections from the Historical and Cultural Materials of Hunan], Vol. 2. (Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1981) 1-8, 7-8: "直到 1920 八月, 授闽粤军如期发动了, 谭延闿还是处之淡然, 邀请吴敬恒、章太炎等来湘演讲, 游山玩水, 酒食征逐, 无视中山先生的北伐大计。我催促他早日出兵, 说得舌敝唇焦, 他还是推诿不决。于是我决计和湘军将领合作倒谭。议定推赵恒惕为总司令, 林支宇为省长。与此同时, 张振武杀了不服调遣的萧昌炽; 廖家栋率第三旅会合各军, 逼近省城。我认为倒谭时机已经成熟, 就委托护法国会议员陈嘉会劝谭延闿自动离开湖南。谭打电话向我哀请等安葬了他夫人再走, 因为他夫人死在上海, 灵柩正在运回湖南的途中。我回答他说: "为了维持省城秩序, 为了保证你的安全, 务必马上离开。至于使你不能够为夫人亲安葬事, 我不久回上海当面道歉。" 他只得忍痛登舟, 回倒上海去了。。。不料赵恒惕在我赴粤复命的时候, 竟背信弃义地在长沙惨杀李仲麟等, 又成了中山先生北伐的障碍。"

which there was factionalism and dissatisfaction concerning pay. However, it does not seem as though Zhao was the prime instigator behind the mutiny and Tan's departure

The image of Tan peacefully resigning is also used by government documents from this era, suggesting how all involved want to portray the events of November 1920 as a relatively regular transition, whatever the truth might actually be. Lin Zhiyu, who became civil governor after Tan left, stated in his letter to the Hunan Provincial Assembly accepting the position that "Zu [Tan] resolutely resigned. He wished to make room for those of even greater talent and virtue than himself. Since firm efforts to persuade [Tan] to remain were without results, therefore we will have an election to appoint a provisional governor."²³ Contrasting this description of Tan's departure with the version given by Zhou Zhenlin, who stated that Tan had to leave in such haste that he was unable to wait for the body of his wife to arrive, it is difficult to know which perspective on these affairs is the more accurate. While it might be easy to reach the conclusion that Lin might merely be attempting to paper over open hostilities with flowery rhetoric, he described Tan's departure very differently from the prior ouster of Zhang Jingyao, the hated militarist who had preceded Tan. Trying to understand why men like Lin would have had a positive perspective on Tan's resignation suggests that there was a perceived need for the appearance of peaceful transition, thus challenging historiographies that emphasize naked military might of *wu* over the culture of *wen* in the warlord period. If political power came through guns and force alone, these appeasing words would not be necessary; appropriate rhetoric and behavior were important as well.

These oral histories confirm many of the points made by this chapter's analysis of the Tan Yankai diary, and challenge the conventional history. Xiao Chengchi's murder becomes a function of Tan's own attempt to secure control over Pingjiang, again suggesting the political savvy of the seeming bookworm. There is mention of Tan's indifference to the national scene, but this is contradicted by the other sources, and seems to be an inaccurate characterization. Zhao Hengti appears to be entirely without blame: the mutiny and exile of Tan are attributed to factionalism on the part of Cheng Qian's subordinates as well as KMT agents sent from Guangzhou. This is not the triumph of *wu* over *wen*, but rather the intersection of material concerns over salary with factional infighting.

Zhao Hengti's Declarations of Innocence

Unsurprisingly, Zhao Hengti's oral history denies any guilt in arranging for Tan's departure. He agrees with many of the details given by Tao and the other oral histories, but blames the forces who had been loyal to Cheng Qian. Tan appears to have made the decision to flee on his own, without pressure from his erstwhile allies. According to Zhao,

After the Hunan army had retaken the province, and engaged in a program of restoring peace and constructing roads, an undercurrent of conflict began to emerge in Changsha. The old forces under Cheng Qian agitated for the

²³ Lin Zhiyu 林支宇. "林君支宇請收回成議另舉賢能文 [Letter from Lin Zhiyu Requesting Withdrawal of Agreement and Other Elections for Talented and Virtuous]" in Hunan Provincial Archives file 23-1-28: 參議會四至六臨時會報告書 (第二本公文), 1920-1924 [Written Reports of the Temporary Representative Body, Books Four Through Six: Official Documents, Volume Two] Hunan Provincial Archives, Changsha, Hunan, People's Republic of China: 350. Original: "組公毅然引退以讓賢能。去志既堅，挽留無術，於是敝會有選舉臨時省長選舉會之舉"

replacement of Tan as head of government by their old leader Cheng. As a result, the subordinates of Tan did not have a peaceful relationship with these elements of Cheng Qian's old forces, and several politicians brokered intrigue. A frosty relationship soon developed between the two sides. In Liling's sixth zone, garrison commander Li Zhonglin was previously an officer loyal to Cheng Qian, and plotted to seek the overthrow of Tan by instigating a mutiny. He started a mutiny and killed Liling garrison commander Xiao Changchi, a subordinate of Tan, in Pingjiang. Tan had no way to make peace in that region, and so retired and fled to Shanghai, ordering me to take the post of commander-in-chief. He also assigned governmental affairs bureau chief Lin Zhiyu to the post of provincial governor, and thus separated out the civil and military functions of government.²⁴

In this version of events, Zhao seems to be little more than an innocent bystander, stuck between the Tan and Cheng factions. There is also an allusion to 'several politicians' brokering intrigue, which is a possible reference to the successful efforts of Zhou Zhenlin and other KMT agents to create discord. Furthermore, he positions himself as a close and loyal friend to Tan, even claiming that Tan ordered him to take over the top military position, which he only accepted under protest. Zhao's supposed reluctance to assume power echoes similar actions by Tan in 1911, when he demurred to Jiao Dafeng's desire to become governor after the revolution. Though both employed the traditional rhetoric demonstrating modesty and an aversion to authority, their eventual elevation to high office strongly suggests that this was merely a mask for their ambitions. More importantly, it shows that both were part of the same cultural circle with norms that prioritized *wen*-style politeness over naked expressions of ambition.

It is in this capacity as his loyal friend that Zhao describes Tan, in a way that is both sympathetic and critical. According to Zhao, Tan was well suited for politics. Firstly, he was of a pleasant disposition, rarely angry or upset. Second, his interpersonal skills were also quite good: no matter who he was with, he knew how to treat them with courtesy and kindness. His near-photographic recall, attention to detail, and energy were good for remembering names and receiving guests. Third, he was also skilled at managing administrative tasks like commenting on memos and responding to telegrams. Finally, his genuine humility regarding these talents meant that he was respected and admired by all. Zhao even goes so far as to favorably compare Tan to his mentor Cai E, the Hunanese general who had been a key opponent of Yuan Shikai's attempt to become emperor. Given the respect that Zhao had for Cai, this was extremely high praise.²⁵

²⁴ Zhao, "Interview," 60-61. Original: 湘軍既光復全省，原可從此走上安定建設之坦途，孰料省城又醞釀政爭之暗潮。程潛舊部，方謀排擠譚公而迎程返湘主持省政。因此譚公部屬，遂與程潛舊部不睦，再益以若干政客之從中搆搆，雙方遂成冰炭。駐紮醴陵之第六區守備隊司令李仲麟為程潛舊將，圖謀驅譚尤急，竟發動兵變，却殺譚公親信之零陵鎮守使蕭昌熾於平山，譚公無法安其位，乃引退赴滬，而令余代理湘軍總司令，派政務廳長林支宇代理省長，分縮軍民兩政。

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

Yet the image of Tan in these interviews was not entirely positive. Describing the infighting between the various Hunanese generals in 1920, Zhao claims that Cheng Qian had been “seduced by politicians into making a mistake, and seeking a negotiated secret peace.” When word of such appeasement was leaked, Cheng was forced to resign.²⁶ The Chinese word he uses here for politicians, 政客 [zhengke], is traditionally one that is employed to disparage bureaucrats; here, Zhao is making the claim that Cheng might have been able to retain power in Hunan were it not for the machinations of the bureaucrats and politicians who supposedly supported him.

While it is unclear who these “politicians” might be, there are hints that Zhao was referring here to Tan Yankai. This only other time the term “politician” is used again during the interview is when Zhao was describing Tan’s unsuccessful efforts to court the former subordinates of Cheng Qian to his side. After Cheng’s resignation, Tan did his best to appeal for the support of these officers, but failed because his character as a politician did not mix with theirs as military men.²⁷ This is but one example of how Zhao complicated his praise of Tan: not only does Tan fail in this instance to leverage his interpersonal talents to win over Cheng’s former commanders, as he supposedly successfully did with many others, but there are also hints, within Zhao’s commentary, that Cheng’s circle saw through his flattery and suspected Tan’s hidden aspirations.

Thus, Zhao’s description of Tan is neither fully critical nor fully hagiographical. Instead of a villain or a hero, Tan appears to be something in between, which might be the more realistic interpretation of his character and actions. Tan’s ability to flatter and build personal relationships was clearly a talent which had helped advance his career, but there also appeared to be limits to how effectively he could deploy this skill. In this sense, Tan’s knack for forging alliances and compromises may have enabled him to transcend his traditional background, but it also seems to have circumscribed his rise and capacity to enact meaningful change. Since his ability to influence others was founded upon his skill at brokering compromise and making others feel good about themselves, then he had far more difficulty inspiring others towards the sort of vision of the future that more successful leaders used as the base of their power. Zhao’s nuanced description of Tan’s “politician” skills captures this ambiguity well.

Letters from Zhao to Tan

Notwithstanding his subtle and nuanced criticisms of Tan, Zhao himself also demonstrated many of these ‘politician’ skills as he tried to reach out to Tan after 1920. After Tan’s resignation, Zhao eventually became the civil and military governor, in addition to the Hunan Army’s commander-in-chief, while Tan retired to Shanghai. In spite of this difference in status, Zhao maintained a respectful and nearly reverent tone suggesting the persistence of a relationship between the two, as elites embedded in a network of shared norms. These letters were conveyed through trusted intermediaries: for example, a July 8 letter refers to Zhong Boyi as the person bearing the letter, and who will accurately convey information back to Zhao.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 58. Original: 誤受政客蠱惑，陰主議和

²⁷ Ibid., 60. Original: 益以政客構煽，雙方遂成水火

²⁸ Letter from Zhao to Tan, dated July 8, “請伯毅面陳” This and other letters can all be found in the Kuo Ting-i Library, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

This is the same Zhong whose oral history is recounted above, and whose name occurs numerous times in Tan's diary in a positive way, so it does not seem possible that he would also participate in some sort of large-scale conspiracy against Tan. The transmission of these letters by such intermediaries ensures at least the appearance of mutual affection. Words of contempt or impertinence on the part of one to the other would be rapidly shared among the peer network. Similarly, the content of these letters shows the assumption of obligation and responsibility: what one does, or does not do, to or for the other seems would also be well known. These letters, in short, suggest how traditional rituals and rhetoric of affinity continued to persist during this period of political turmoil, challenging the conventional history of the warlord era as popularized by Tao Juyin.

One example in particular demonstrates this intersection through the request of a favor. In an April 11 letter, Zhao Hengti asked Tan Yankai to look after his younger brother, Zhao Hengjing (also known as Zhao Junmai, 1901-1988), before the latter left Shanghai to study in America.²⁹ Furthermore, Tan's diary for April 19 of the same year also described this encounter.³⁰ The fact that the elder Zhao asked his predecessor for this favor speaks to the networks of obligation and indebtedness in which these elites operated.

The inclusion of personal matters within these letters also suggested obedience to a certain system of norms that compelled at least the appearance of affection and friendship between the two, regardless of the complications of their internal feelings. In a letter dated August 29, Zhao complained about his foot disease, and describes its painful recurrence in spite of treatment with Chinese medicine. He then inquired after an illness from which Tan was apparently suffering, and inquired if he had fully recovered yet.³¹ This is a particular sort of rhetoric, affected or otherwise, that signified close intimacy and friendship; details about foot fungus are rarely shared among mere colleagues rather than friends. The same can be said about the gifts that they exchanged: in that August 29 letter, Zhao stated that he was moved by Tan's gift of a refrigerator and food,³² and sent an electric plate along with the December 6 letter.³³ Why would Zhao pose these questions and offer these gifts to Tan, the man whose removal from office he allegedly engineered not two years prior? Does this call into question his culpability, or is this some sort of Machiavellian scheme to lull his rival into quiescence? (If the latter, it would appear as though Tan retained great influence in Hunan, even after his humiliating departure.) More interestingly, if we step away from the question about what happened in November of 1920, it might be useful to think that the tone of caring and empathy upon which these phrases is something mandatory that elites like Zhao were supposed to exhibit.

The same point can be made when considering Zhao's continued pleading for Tan to return to Hunan: it strains credulity to think that Zhao would urge precisely the opposite of what he supposedly plotted, is it therefore merely another example of following the obligatory

²⁹ Letter from Zhao to Tan, dated April 11: “舍弟恆慙赴美留學定五月七日由滬放洋特令晉謁乞訓誨” Though no year is given, we know from the “Database of Research on Culture of Chinese Studying Abroad” that Zhao Junmai graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1926, suggesting that the letter was sent in 1922.

³⁰ Tan Yankai Diary, April 19, 1922: “趙恆慙來，夷午之弟也，將赴美留學，與談久之去。”

³¹ Letter from Zhao to Tan, August 29: “近因足疾復發頗以為苦中藥雖效然時有反覆鈞座亦患此疾近已愈否”

³² Ibid.: “承賜制冰器食品心感無既”

³³ Letter from Zhao to Tan, dated December 6: “仲奎兄邊部承贈電爐心感之至”

forms? Examples of this include a letter dated November 5, in which he vehemently disagrees with a previous statement of Tan's regarding low probability of returning.³⁴ In another letter, dated August 29, Zhao wrote that he wished for Tan to return to Hunan so as to offer him guidance on everything.³⁵ Again, these words might be merely rhetorical, and Zhao might be attempting to deceive Tan, as well as other potential readers of the letter, into thinking that he has been always been an ally and friend. Indeed, those like Mao, Huang, and Yao who argue that Zhao betrayed Tan might use these statements as evidence to support their claims, and that this deception demonstrates how nefarious Zhao could be. Whatever the case might be; it is instead more fruitful to step back and use these letters to examine the norms that men like Zhao and Tan had to support—at least in appearance, if not in substance.

That being said, these unpublished letters challenge the conventional narratives of betrayal and factionalism that authors like Tao Juyin present, and show that Tan and Zhao continued to practice the traditional cultural behaviors of the late Qing elite. Their persistence in continuing these customs suggests their separation from the concerns of the common soldiers whose dissatisfaction prompted Tan's resignation. Moreover, this also suggests an unwillingness to change their personas to conform to the emerging mass politics of the era and appeal to broader concerns like ideology. Instead, they seem content to continue to ground their influence in personal relationships and elite networks, as if the political conditions had not dramatically changed.

Conclusion

This chapter has challenged the conventional history of the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny and subsequent transition of power from Tan to Zhao by using unpublished materials to show how their relationship persisted after what was supposedly an acrimonious split. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, historians have typically seen this event as a betrayal of Tan by Zhao, exemplifying the manner in which the traditions of the late Qing elite quickly devolved into open rivalry for power. Yet the letters sent by Zhao as well as Tan's own diary suggests that their relationship remained cordial in years after, and that Tan was targeted for the same sort of retroactive critique by the provincial state that former governors Tang Xiangming and Zhang Jingyao had received. This is not to definitively argue that Zhao was not a factor in Tan's departure, since the sincerity of their relationship is not something that can be discerned from these materials. Yet what is important is the rhetoric of courtesy that continued to link them, and preserved their standing within the network of relationships in which they were embedded.

What, then, is gained by this chapter's analysis of these unpublished sources and oral histories? First, thinking of these leaders as more similar than different challenges the dominant narrative's emphasis on warlord rule supplanting civilian administration. The mutiny that precipitated Tan's fall from power occurred because of the factional infighting that was endemic to the political culture of the early republic—and was arguably present during the imperial era before and the communist era afterwards. The transition from Tan to Zhao did not mark the betrayal of civilian ideals by a military menace.

³⁴ Letter from Zhao to Tan, dated November 5: “我公不能返湘之說惕極不謂然時局”

³⁵ Letter from Zhao to Tan, dated August 29: “亟盼鈞座回湘指示一切此尤恆惕所私心切禱者也”

Second, thinking of figures like Tan and Zhao as embedded within particular networks instead of as free-floating actors constitutes a challenge to the narrative of individualistic warlords fighting amongst themselves for power. All of these figures are linked; what one does in Changsha is made known within days in Beijing or Shanghai. The efforts of Guangzhou-based KMT agents seem important for explaining why Tan was exiled. Moreover, scattered within the letters from Zhao are references to prominent figures like Chen Jiongming, Liang Qichao, and Liang Shiyi (1869-1933), suggesting that figures of this stature cannot truly operate independently. Instead, they must build coalitions and maintain certain moral standards in order to win the support of others. This shows how ethical behavior mattered for these elites. Even the most negative interpretation of Zhao needs to acknowledge the fact that he could not openly admit betraying Tan, signaling the existence of some sort of understood and shared morality that he could not overtly defy in order to maintain the respect of those around him.

Furthermore, his letters to Tan in the years following 1920 illustrate the traditional culture in which they were embedded, and that seemed increasingly detached from the concerns of the majority. Three of the norms characterizing this culture can be easily discerned from these letters: an evident and personal caring for one's peers, a willingness to do favors, and the employment of a respectful and humble tone. In this light, it is worth repeating here how Zhao characterized Tan in his oral history: "his ability to connect with others was just going through the motions. He believed in the importance of planning instead."³⁶ Perhaps this suggests Tan's rejection, intentional or otherwise, of what his peers understood to be the proper attitude. Zhao makes him seem as though he was simply unable or unwilling to respond to the others in his network in a way that engendered loyalty. The insinuations by Zhou Zhenlin and his KMT colleagues of Tan's indifference to the larger national picture are another example of this critique: this callous disregard justifies their conspiracy to remove him from power.

Appreciating the importance of "proper" rhetoric and behavior suggests how elites aspiring to power in late Qing and early Republican China believed that they needed to perform in their interactions with their peers. Tan, Zhao, and their counterparts across the nation were enabled by this political culture and these networks to power during the early years of the republic. As such, they had neither the incentive nor the capacity to adapt to the new mass politics that emerge in subsequent years. Later leaders like Sun Yatsen, Chiang Kaishek, or Mao Zedong, being outsiders to this culture, were better able to adapt their methods to the new mass politics and begin to speak to broader ideological concerns that entailed more radical transformations of Chinese society. Elites like Tan and Zhao, regardless of their more modest contributions to provincial governance, were relegated to secondary roles as a consequence.

³⁶ Zhao, "Interview," 71. Original: "對人絕不敷衍，作事最重計劃步驟"

Epilogue: Memories, Politics, and Lives

This dissertation has made three main historiographical interventions. First, it has demonstrated that the Pingjiang mutiny was not an example of warlordism's triumph over civilian rule. Conventional histories typically interpret this event as exemplifying the moment when *wu* fully replaced *wen*, and militarist anarchy descended upon China. This is an oversimplification, as rhetoric, courtesy, and other 'proper' standards of behavior that should be categorized as *wen* were important for establishing and maintaining power during this time.

Second, it has shown how one element of *wen*—traditional elite culture from the late Qing—persisted through the years of "Warlord Era" in such a way that detached men like Tan Yankai and Zhao Hengti from the larger social concerns facing the Chinese masses. The same background that empowered these elites during the early years of the republic prevented them from adapting to the mass politics that would emerge in the 1920s. Tan was exiled after the Pingjiang mutiny more because he did not adequately respond to the demands of his subordinates, and not because Zhao pushed him out, as the conventional histories claim.

This connects to this dissertation's third intervention: a reexamination and recontextualization of the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny that shows the constructed nature of historical writing about China's early republic. Immensely influential, both Li Jiannong's *Political History* and Tao Juyin's *Anecdotes* implicitly commented on the period through their historical narratives. Li critiqued those interested in gradual reform in favor of valorizing those advocating for complete political revolution: an ironic predisposition given his own past advocacy for federalism, but an understandable position to promote as an intellectual during the KMT rule. Similarly, Tao Juyin portrays the era as amoral and chaotic, with various elites forging and breaking alliances in a competition to establish hegemony over the nation; he emphasizes this aspect of the "Warlord Era" in order to highlight the ideological unity of post-1949 China. Although historians readily acknowledge the constructed nature of narratives as a general principle, we have inherited Li and Tao's interpretive frameworks too uncritically. We still think of the "Warlord Era" as solely a time of anarchy and villainy.

Why is it so difficult to be critical of these stereotypes of the "Warlord Era"? The reasons rest in the ways that we understand the evolutionary movement of history, in terms of space, time, and particular consequences or endpoints. First, in terms of space, certain places have been deemed "modern" or "progressive" and others "backwards" or "conservative." Hunan's constitutional experiments in the early twentieth century demonstrate that a confluence of ideas created "progressive" possibilities in a "backwards" space that are beyond that linear binary. Second, in terms of time, not only were certain people mischaracterized as either *wen* or *wu*, but certain periods have been exaggerated as either *wen* or *wu*. The "Warlord Period" is one of these, caricatured as a militarized, *wu* period. Based upon traditional Chinese historiographical tropes, the struggle between *wen* and *wu*, as well as the idea that periods of disunity must be followed by unification, lock our conception of China into a fixed image that is difficult to escape.

China's revolutions have been embedded within a paradigm that traditional society needed to be transcended. While Tan's failures to adapt to mass politics suggest the truth of this statement, this revolutionary framework has overwhelmingly become the dominant lens

through which Chinese history is currently interpreted, and erased possible alternatives for how the early republic should be understood. This has made the valorization of the strong centralized state by “revolutionary” historians a far more conservative and retrograde paradigm when compared to more innovative proposals like federalism, that were promoted by elites like Li Jiannong or Tan Yankai in a way that was not amenable to mass politics. This conclusion will help to explain how and why these threads of space and time, in the aftermath of the mutiny, contributed to interpretive frameworks of revolutionary disparagement of the period. A comparative focus on literature and fiction will also highlight the constructed nature of narrative.

Zhao Hengti: the Ostensible Victor

Examining the aftermath of 1920, it is clear that the Hunan mutiny was crucial for shaping the four lives who are the focus of this dissertation. Immediately afterwards, it appeared as though Zhao Hengti had emerged as the victor. Following the mutiny, he imprisoned and executed those responsible, including Li Zhonglin.¹ As governor of Hunan for the following six years, he oversaw the passage of the provincial constitution and his formal election to the highest political office.² He was relatively successful in quelling domestic disturbances on the part of labor activists as well as insurgent communists, and he led an invasion force into Hubei under the pretense of rescuing its people from their governor, Wang Zhanyuan (1861-1934). This expedition overextended his troops and incited an attack by northern forces led by Wu Peifu, but he was able to retreat and mount a successful defense. In spite of the continual threat of invasion from north or south that required half of provincial revenues to be earmarked for to the military, Zhao was able to financially support a number of infrastructural programs, including road construction, entrepreneurial efforts like a spinning mill, and the founding of Hunan University.³

Yet the political turmoil that had seemingly ended in 1920 was soon to return: in 1923, rumors began to circulate that Tan Yankai was plotting to retake the province. According to Zhao, he had been maintaining close communications with Tan, and had even sent letters asking him to come back to become governor again once the constitution had been ratified by the provincial assembly.⁴ Tan supposedly refused this invitation, and asked Zhao to continue in his place. But because intermediaries interrupted their correspondence, Zhao was apparently unable to defuse the crisis, leading to the fracture of the fragile peace that had existed since 1920, and to open war between the two former allies that Tan would lose.⁵ Those who had

¹ Huang Yi'ou, “Memories”

² The text of the Hunan Provincial Constitution can be found in Miao Quanji [Miao Ch'uan-chi] 繆全吉, 中國制憲史資料彙編—憲法篇 [Collection of Documents and Data in Relation to the History of the Chinese Constitution], (Taipei, Taiwan: Academia Historica, 1991), 781-837.

³ Zhao, “Interview,” 66. It is worth noting that Chang P'eng-yuan estimates provincial military expenses constituted 80% of revenues, Chang, P'eng-yuan, [Zhang Pengyuan] “The Enactment and Enforcement of the Provincial Constitution in Hunan, 1920-1925,” in *Symposium on the History of the Republic of China*, Vol. 2 (Taipei, Taiwan: China Cultural Service, 1981): 533-580.

⁴ Presumably these are the letters referred to in Chapter Five; Zhao even makes reference to the fact that they still exist and can be consulted.

⁵ Zhao, “Interview,” 69. Original: 余屢電譚公返湘主政，而電訊均為衡陽謝國光所截，故始終未獲電訊。

supported Zhao were placed into positions of military and political importance, including Tang Shengzhi (1899-1970), who would himself rise up against Zhao in 1926. Zhao, supposedly tired of infighting among former comrades, retired from public life to Shanghai. He eventually followed the KMT to Taiwan in 1949, where he would live out the remainder of his days, studying Buddhism and practicing calligraphy. He died in Taipei in 1971.⁶

It is hard to take Zhao's version of these post-1920 events at face value. His excuse for Tan's continued exile was that the constitution prevented his return; he also claimed that the breakdown in their relationship that led to battles between their supporters in 1923 was caused by jealous intermediaries. These justifications are self-serving, there is little else to support his claims, and it is hard to imagine how their relationship could deteriorate so rapidly without at least some culpability on his part. Decades later, Zhao lamented that Tan was never able to return to Hunanese politics: a lament that rings oddly false given this 1923 conflict.⁷

It was Zhao's actions in 1923, rather than the mutiny of 1920, that help to explain the historical judgement that he, as a *wu* military man, had replaced the *wen* civilian bureaucrat Tan. Zhao cynically used of the law as his excuse for fighting Tan and remaining in power, claiming that he was merely obeying the will of the people and defending the constitution. Thus, Zhao's subsequent treatment of Tan had ramifications for how onlookers adjudicated Hunan's experiments with constitutions and federalism. This is most clearly demonstrated in the example of Li Jiannong's increasingly skeptical and disillusioned attitude towards constitutions and federalism after this point.

Li Jiannong's Response to Zhao Hengti: Changing Perspectives on Constitutionalism and Federalism

Li evolved from actively supporting federalism to dismissing reformers as regressive forces from a bygone era, and we can trace this process through his actions and writings from 1920 to 1923. In 1921, Li was invited to chair a committee charged with drafting the Hunan constitution. The process took roughly one year before the document was revealed to the public in 1922. In November of that year, Li was nominated for the position of education department director for Hunan by the provincial assembly, and he assumed the role in December. He was then elected to serve as the chair of the Provincial Affairs Council, which was effectively a provincial premier-like role under Zhao Hengti.⁸

It was in the summer of 1922, just before he assumed official office in Hunan, that Li wrote another article titled "The Issue of Unifying the Republic," a sequel to his two-part essay from 1917. In it, he reiterated his argument regarding the necessity of constitutional federalism for China. Contrasting the fiction of China's unity in 1922 with the reality of its regional militarism and laughable central state, Li again pressed for China to move towards a federal system in order to achieve true unity.

Yet this third essay displays a number of differences from its two predecessors. The most obvious of these is its fixation on troop disbandment (裁兵), which is how the essay begins. In his 1917 essay, Li had written that the military was an obstacle to true unity, as the

⁶ Ibid., 73. Original: 不忍袍澤犧牲于內爭。

⁷ Ibid., 65. Original: 譚公此時未能返湘，實為一大憾事。

⁸ Hua Chu "Li Jiannong," 61-65.

lack of central authority had created an arms race between the various militarists who were truly controlling China, as each built up their forces in order to compete with their peers. In 1922, he built upon his previous claims, arguing that peace would require each army to disband their troops. Since none would be willing to be the first to do so, the stalemate would inevitably continue. According to Li, this stalemate, in turn, would prevent true unity from occurring, thus perpetuating the cycle. Moreover, Li continued, disbanding these troops might prove to be damaging to society: in an economy of scarce resources, and even scarcer job opportunities, disarmed soldiers frequently resort to banditry and violence in order to earn a living. Recalling how Zhao Hengti and Tan Yankai had disbanded much of the Hunan Army after 1911, Li did not have to look to contemporary Europe for examples of the dangers of military disarmament and widespread unemployment.

Another key difference between this essay and its predecessors is in Li's apparent audience, which seems to be more aimed at a non-elite readership. This can be seen in his use of domestic as well as foreign examples. This third essay, like the first two, draws from the knowledge of non-Chinese political systems and history that Li likely acquired while studying abroad. However, in this essay, Li inserts many more references to specific aspects of 1922 China with which his readers would presumably be familiar. Among these are descriptions of the behavior of militarists like Wu Peifu and Lu Yongxiang (1867-1933). Li also criticizes both the old national assembly in Beijing, and the extraordinary national assembly convened in Guangzhou. The 1922 essay is also written in more vernacular Chinese (白話) compared to its 1917 counterparts, where Li uses literary Chinese (文言文) to make his arguments. This change of usage both speaks to the overall shift in language and discourse heralded by the 1919 May Fourth and New Culture movements, but also suggests how Li's intended audience may have changed. When combined with his inclusion of domestic affairs to his prior method of foreign historical precedents, this shift in his language pattern suggests Li aims this 1922 essay at a more popular audience compared to his 1917 arguments, suggesting how he was trying to alter his arguments to better fit mass party politics.

The third, and perhaps most important difference between the Li writing in 1922 and the Li writing in 1917 is his changed perspective on the efficacy of legal theory. In 1917, he put forward extremely theoretical proposals for implementing federalism in China, as if he were trying to persuade his elite readership to spontaneously institute this new system in their own political lives. By contrast, the Li of 1922 is far more pragmatic in his method, explicitly responding to those who argue for the necessity of proper legal procedures and representation to establish a constitution. The discussions about federalism thus helped to inform his sense of possible counterarguments. But instead of having debates about the legality of a constitutional convention, or whether to include previously elected representatives from one of the two extant national assemblies, Li writes that what is most important is simply establishing that constitution.

In discussing Li's critique of those who overly focus upon legal theory, it is important to clarify that he is not against the necessary role of legal institutions for moving China towards unity. For him, a legal document like a constitution will serve as the fundamental political authority that will preserve the peace between regions, enable the discharge of troops, and end the fighting that China was experiencing in 1922. His critique of an overemphasis on legal theory, in contrast, is aimed at those who want to make sure whatever new structures of

government emerge are legally enabled by currently extant institutions. For Li, this is a non-starter; the Beiyang regime and the old national assembly are overly fixated on following traditional paths of military conquest, so whatever national unity they might create would be nominal and not substantive. China should instead look to the history of other nations in convening a constitutional convention: he points out that the United States successfully held one in more than one hundred years ago, and the French Third Republic had done so as well. Li finds inspiration in nations without formal constitutions, like Great Britain, who are able to pragmatically deal with contemporary political circumstances.

Li was thus advocating for a particular legal position somewhere on the spectrum between obedience to the law at all times and pragmatic compliance with the law only when it is effective. The ideal of a properly working political structure is what Li was working towards in 1922, but he was not so naïve as to be blind to the gap between that ideal and reality. For him, fidelity to the law is a worthy ultimate goal, but only instrumentally, as a way to achieve a true unity in China. But that was probably not how Li himself would have framed the issue; according to Li, the laws are only worthy of obedience when they are either just or effective; there is no moral obligation to the law in itself.⁹

Li's 1922 cynicism about the law, in sharp contrast to his optimism from 1917, suggests how the shift in his political circumstances might have informed a transformation in his attitude. Though he retained his enthusiasm for federalism, his complicated position concerning when the law should be obeyed hints at some frustration with those who use legal and political institutions as an excuse to maintain their own power, perhaps indicating dissatisfaction with Zhao Hengti. Li would resign from office in 1924, never to return to politics. He would go on to write *Political History*, teach in Wuhan, and support a number of philanthropic activities like the construction of libraries and schools in his home county. He was a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference after 1949, and died in Wuhan in 1963.¹⁰

Tao Juyin's Spatial Politics: *Anecdotes* and Other Genres

After the mutiny, Li's fellow historian Tao Juyin went on to become a prolific journalist and author. His works included biographies of military figures, essays on life in Shanghai during World War II, and many more. His work often followed in the same style as his *Anecdotes*, as demonstrated by his biography of Yuan Shikai, *Romance of Yuan Shikai* [袁世凱演義] that exposes its readers to private conversations between its key actors, in a way that suggests insider information, and gives his readers insight into the motivations and personalities of these individuals, as if he had firsthand knowledge.¹¹ However, given the lack of evidence that Tao had access to this information, as well as the propensity for journalists in Republican China to embellish their narratives in order to appeal to readers and address larger trends, a critical eye is required when reading its tales of heroism, villainy, loyalty, and betrayal.

⁹ The above is all taken from Li Jiannong 李劍農, "Minguo Tongyi Wenti" 民國統一問題 [The Issue of Unifying the Republic] in *Pacific Magazine* [太平洋雜誌], Vol. 3, No. 7, (1922): 1-10.

¹⁰ Hua Chu "Li Jiannong," 61-65.

¹¹ Tao Juyin 陶菊隱, 袁世凱演義 [Romance of Yuan Shikai], (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979)

Anecdotes is only one example of how stories about the warlord era suffered from sensationalism, and Tao was not the only writer who purported to give his readers a glimpse of what life was like beyond their city or town. This was especially true for writers based in Shanghai, where Tao eventually relocated in 1936 to become editor of *Xinwen Bao* (新聞報). He only retired from journalism after 1949, when he became the deputy director of the Shanghai Research Institute of Culture and History (上海文史館). He was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution but was rehabilitated before passing away in 1989.¹²

Given the importance of Tao's contribution to historical narratives, it is worth briefly reflecting on the genres of journalism, history writing, and fiction; doing so helps to highlight the role of space in constructed historical narratives. Writers with Tao's background would often pen stories and essays that described their hometowns in vivid terms that have since been misinterpreted as thinly-veiled chronicles of actual events. These writings were incredibly Shanghai-oriented in perspective, reflecting the background of so many of these writers, who had emigrated from their supposedly backward and traditional hometowns to ply their trade in the nation's center for popular culture. Consequently, histories of life during the Republican era, especially of places outside the metropolitan Shanghai area, have been heavily informed by these works of literature. This has the effect of exacerbating the perceived difference between Shanghai and the provinces, distorting subsequent perceptions of how truly backwards those places were. Being a native Hunanese residing in Shanghai, Tao is a clear example of this group.¹³

Another is Ba Jin, whose vivid literary descriptions of complex family relationships *Family* was, and still is, interpreted as an accurate representation of what life was like for a those belonging to that social class in the years following 1911. In 1923, 19-year-old Ba Jin left the provincial capital of Chengdu in Western China for Shanghai in order to avoid being trapped by the feudal traditions of his hometown. By the 1930s, he had become an editor and prolific writer of fiction, often serialized in various Shanghai periodicals; it was in this latter capacity that he penned what would eventually become *Family* in the literary supplement to *Shibao*. An overnight success, *Family* depicted the suffocating nature of traditional culture and parental control over the youth of China by focusing on the saga of the Gao brothers.

It is important to note here that Ba Jin made no pretenses towards accuracy. His characters and plot are wholly fictional, though perhaps inspired by his own experience as a young man who fled Chengdu for the modernity represented by Shanghai. Moreover, by eschewing any aspirations concerning literal truth, he was able to appeal to his readers with color and detail that a more ostensibly objective news article could not employ. When historians try to reconstruct what life was like in areas beyond the metropolitan coasts, fiction like *Family* provides a resource that would otherwise be inaccessible.

And yet this material, like Tao's *Anecdotes*, should only be utilized with caution and discernment. Kristin Stapleton's recent monograph on Ba Jin and *Family* makes this point on multiple levels, showing how his depiction of life compares to less fictional materials, like government documents or business records. Slave girls, patriarchs, and soldiers are just a few

¹² <https://baike.baidu.com/item/陶菊隱>

¹³ *Ibid.*, see also Tao, *Memoirs*.

of the interpretive lenses that she uses to examine how this text can be responsibly deployed alongside drier and less exciting texts to arrive at a richer understanding of what life was like. Returning to the divide between Shanghai and the rest of China, Stapleton argues that the image of Republican China's 'hinterland' is strongly influenced by fictional works like *Family*. There is no small degree of selection bias at work, with only those who have left places like Chengdu for Shanghai able to shape perceptions of Chengdu; those who retained some affection for that place are absent from the public conversation, resulting in a skewed perspective. Accordingly, Stapleton notes,

By having his young heroes and heroines, such as Gao Juehui and Gao Shuying, escape from their (and his) gloomy hometown to a life of freedom in Shanghai, Ba Jin contributed to an emerging conception that a huge cultural gap existed between coastal cities like Shanghai, where foreign influence was strong and innovation flourished, and other parts of China, whose culture was seen as stagnant. Ba Jin played a significant role in helping to create a stereotypical 'traditional' China that could be attacked by political and social activists of the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁴

In other words, Ba Jin's descriptions of Chengdu life, despite being explicitly fictional, contributed to the widespread belief in a vast chasm between modern Shanghai and the backwards hinterland. In the same way, the embellishments and exaggerations in Tao's *Anecdotes*, though not explicitly fictional, have contributed to our skewed perception of China's early republic as nothing more than amoral anarchy. While it is possible to generously interpret Tao's writing unintentionally creating this perception of the hinterland, the attacks of Shen Congwen (1902-1988) on his contemporaries for this very practice suggest how such an interpretation is overly charitable: Tao must have been aware of the effect of his writing.

At first glance, Shen's identity as another author from the Chinese hinterland might make his stories appear to be another inappropriate attempt to blend fact and fiction. Shen, a native of West Hunan, was of the same generation as Ba Jin, and also published fiction in Shanghai periodicals that centered upon what Chinese society was like outside of Shanghai. Akin to Stapleton's analysis of Ba Jin, Jeffrey Kinkley claims that Shen's fictional descriptions of his native place were and are frequently interpreted as historically accurate. According to Kinkley, Shen's "biography seems most closely intertwined with great events in Chinese social and literary history when his little native region, West Hunan, is the backdrop. Shen created a vision of the place so alluring that critics and readers still argue about how literally his regional works ought to be read."¹⁵ Through the use of plot and narrative, Shen was about to leave his readers with a deep impression of a place that very few of them would ever visit. Given the paucity of material concerning physically and culturally distant places like West Hunan that were available to readers in Shanghai, it should come as no surprise that his fiction could be misread as describing social realities. Given our current temporal distance from that setting, Kinkley's observation that concerning the literal nature of these texts makes sense.

¹⁴ Stapleton, *Fact in Fiction*, 5

¹⁵ Jeffrey Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford, Stanford University Press: 1987), 4.

Shen Congwen critiqued Shanghai in ways that can help us reassess the Shanghai-hinterland divide. Unlike the descriptions of Chengdu found in the works of his contemporary Ba Jin, Shen did not welcome the modernity of Shanghai with open arms, and appeared to strongly resent the manner in which his native place was utilized in a quasi-orientalist way to extol the modernity of China's treaty ports. As Kinkley notes, Shen was a caustic critic of the "Shanghai-type" of lowbrow populism, which he saw as pandering to the lowest common denominator, using gossip and scandal to draw the attention of readers away from more serious writing on politics and social issues. For him, this form and style of writing was emblematic of the overwhelming concern for wealth and fascination with celebrity that seemed to suffuse the city, and which he deeply resented. He faulted foreign influence for this growing trend among metropolitan elites compared to "us outside the concessions," suggesting a cultural chasm between the coast and the provinces of a much different sort than seen in Ba Jin's fiction. In other words, the real rift was caused by industrial commercialism and a disposable, manufactured celebrity, which indicated the moral bankruptcy of the imported Western-hybrid culture rather than traditional Chinese culture.

In contrast, while *Family* was a story that supposedly represented the rift between the traditional China of the hinterland and modern China, Shen attacked the way in which stories like *Family* actively constructed that same rift it was supposedly only describing.¹⁶ In this, he suggested a line of critique that would be echoed decades later by Stapleton on the Chengdu of Ba Jin's *Family*: "Although Chengdu was far from stagnant, *Family* and its sequels established Chengdu in the imaginations of the educated public in eastern China as a close-minded city of stifling conservatism."¹⁷ Though Stapleton is specific in her comparison between Shanghai and Chengdu, the broader point applies to the whole of the area beyond the more modernized coast as well. Furthermore, though Shen did not explicitly criticize Tao, Shen's critiques can be easily levied against *Anecdotes* for overemphasizing the chasm between the lives of his readers in the PRC of 1956 with the early republic described in his text in order to appeal to potential readers' sense of drama. In this, it is again worth noting how the popular appeal of texts like *Family* and *Anecdotes* speaks to the rise of mass culture that was swiftly growing in China.

One goal of this dissertation has been to excavate history from rumor and fiction, or at the very least, to take seriously the historical project of evaluating and assessing sources from the past as modes of greater or lesser factual evidence. In personal memoirs, contemporary news accounts, as well as historical overviews like *Anecdotes* and *Political History*, we can see as much fiction as fact, both in the construction of particular narratives as well as in the assertion of basic events. It is easy to oversimplify the "plot" of Chinese history, and to assume cyclical patterns of fragmentation and unification rather than take seriously the possibility of true historical contingency and the opening up of unimagined paths. Too many stories follow pre-proscribed tropes from the literary world.

In these stories, personality, or projected personality, played a significant role for pushing the plot of historical narrative forward. Warlords were incredibly diverse, and yet they have been flattened and reduced to a particular typology that pigeonholes them as villains in the narrative of Chinese history. The story of warlordism is thus reduced to the personality and

¹⁶ Ibid., 194-202.

¹⁷ Stapleton, *Fact in Fiction*, 183.

despotism of particular individuals, with the possibility that leaders could cooperate together as a band of brothers, in keeping with tropes from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, disappearing from standard historical narratives.

This over-ascription of history to literary genres has meant that significant injustice has been done to our understanding of the countryside and its contributions to modernity. Despite Mao Zedong's famous deployment of rural basecamps for the revolutionary cause, so-called revolutionaries and scholars have long continued to locate modernity in urban areas. As Wen-hsin Yeh, Shakhar Rahav, and others have begun to note, the Chinese hinterland offered substantive values in the dynamic dialectic that produced Chinese revolutionary modernity. It is the contention of this dissertation that the so-called hinterland of Hunan could actively produce other forms and visions of significant change and modernity, ones that potentially rivaled the mass politics of Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong.¹⁸

Instead of framing this history as a tragedy, this dissertation has explored Hunan's forays into constitutionalism and federalism as a failed experiment. Historical imagination should not simply mean assuming certain things to follow common literary tropes; rather, it means understanding the value of contingency in forging the course that history ultimately took. Historical imagination enables an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between related concepts, such as revolution and reform, or between constitutionalism and federalism.

Tan Yankai: Turning to the Fold of Party Politics

The mutiny, of course, was of great significance for Tan Yankai. Following his short exile and attempt to return to power, he became a disciple of Sun Yatsen and an elder with the KMT, rising to high office. At the time of his death in 1930, Tan was the Premier of the Administrative Yuan in the KMT National Government based in Nanjing. The head of the legislative branch at the time, Hu Hanmin gave a speech shortly after Tan's passing in which he mourned the loss of his comrade and greatly praised him. According to Hu, he had known and worked with Tan in revolutionary politics for ten years, and so was in a position to assess his life and extol his virtues. In a speech titled "悼譚組菴先生" [Mourning for Mr. Tan Zu'an] (Tan's courtesy name), he spoke for some time on the loss that Tan's death represented for the nation, the party, and the people.

According to Hu, Tan was exceptionally intelligent and able to deal with others in a polite way. Even in his youth, his talent at composing essays was well-known. While this might be expected from the son of a scholar-official who would eventually be awarded the *jinshi* degree and a post with the prestigious Hanlin Academy, Hu goes on to emphasize Tan's talent for solving practical problems that he also demonstrated at a young age, when his father was governor-general in Liangguang, perhaps indirectly referring to the praise of Weng Tonghe. Furthermore, the manner in which Tan would display his penetrating insights and wisdom was modest and humble, which meant that his considerable abilities were always underestimated.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wen-hsin Yeh, *Provincial Passages: Culture, Space, and the Origins of Chinese Communism* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1996); Shakhar Rahav, *The Rise of Political Intellectuals in Modern China: May Fourth Societies and the Roots of Mass-Party Politics* (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 2015)

¹⁹ Hu Hanmin 胡漢民, "悼譚組菴先生" [Mourning for Mr. Tan Zu'an] in Zhu Chuanyu 朱傳譽, ed., 譚延闓傳記資料 [Materials for the Biography of Tan Yankai], (Taipei, Tianyi Press, 1979), 19-29. Original: 譚先生天資明敏,

Tan is also described as being able to resolve intractable conflicts between his peers, and that he would be able to handle any situation properly.²⁰

This underestimation of Tan was compounded by his typically easy-going and mild demeanor, but Hu claimed that this surface impression masked a determined core that could be awe-inspiring. His personality was a good fit for the position of premier, being “peaceful and fair:” precisely the bearing that prime ministers under the imperial system were said to have. In the ten years that Hu worked with him, there were no harsh words or ill feelings exchanged.²¹ Given the infamous infighting endemic to KMT senior leadership during the 1920s, this point, if true and not an exaggeration, is worth emphasizing. Moreover, this ability to forge good relationships with all he meets resonates with Tao’s earlier critique of Tan’s propensity to be a people-pleaser.

There are some differences in this version of Tan that do not seem to fit with the one described earlier, first among them being his apparently decisive nature. Hu describes Tan as a resolute and passionate leader, as exemplified by his actions during the occupation of Guangzhou by Yang Ximin (1886-1967) and Liu Zhenhuan (1890-1972). Yang and Liu, using their armies from Yunnan and Guizhou, took over the city in June of 1925, shortly after the death of Sun Yatsen in March of that year. According to Hu, Tan’s fiery exhortations were responsible for convincing his wavering subordinates to stand firm and counter-attack. He said, “Destroying Yang and Liu is the work in front of us that we must do. Their power might be great, but if we are determined, there is nothing we cannot accomplish.”²² According to Hu, the same unwavering commitment to success under all circumstances could be seen later, when Tan’s command over troops during the Northern Expedition began to fail, and his soldiers started to disobey his orders. Whereas many other commanders might give up and flee, Tan, in contrast, “remained committed, and would not give up when confronted with hardship. This true spirit of loyalty and persistence is a model!”²³

Hu’s eulogy serves as a reminder to be wary of *wen-wu* binaries. His praise for Tan’s military leadership here is especially interesting, given Tan’s lack of training and background in the subject. Indeed, in his narrative of the initial stages of planning for the Northern Expedition, Hu recalls his misgivings about placing Tan in a central role, predicting that “even if his orders were followed, he is not a military man, so there is no guarantee that his decisions would be competent.”²⁴ This is not to say that scholar-officials of Tan’s class could not become

自小便以能文章為士林稱賞，而其精到練達，更非普通人所能企及。As with the Xu Chongli Biographical Chronicle referenced on pg. 49 of this volume, Tan’s courtesy name (祖菴) is here given as “組菴,” and it is unclear why: it is possible this is an error, or that he went by multiple names.

²⁰ Ibid., 18. Original: 有時有人為什麼問題互相爭持，譚先生一來，往往令人意消；遇到難以解決的事，一經譚先生區處，也就十分妥貼了。

²¹ Ibid., Original: 譚先生「休休有容」，具有古人所謂宰輔的氣度，他的性格，祇有「和平中正」四個字，可以得其大畧。兄弟與譚先生相處十餘年，從未見其疾言厲色。

²² Ibid., 23. Original: 消滅楊劉是我們目前必要的工作，楊劉的力量從然大，假如我們肯下極大的決心，便無有不行。

²³ Ibid., 21. Original: 可是譚先生還毅然為之，不辭艱苦，這種效忠主義、堅強不屈的精神，真可為我人的法式！

²⁴ Ibid. Original: 組菴究竟不是軍人，即使其他部隊，能受組菴指揮，但組菴是否勝任，也不能不稍稍顧慮。

competent military commanders, but rather that Tan's effectiveness in this area was supposedly weak: an aspect of his reputation that was emphasized Tao Juyin's *Anecdotes*. Stepping back to look at the larger context of Hu and his audience, his effusive and lavish admiration for Tan and his selfless behavior seems to be an explicit critique of Chiang Kai-shek. By 1930, Chiang had risen to the top position in the KMT hierarchy, while Hu's rise had been cut short by his alleged involvement in the 1925 assassination of Liao Zhongkai. As a result, there is a distinct air of jealousy when Hu compares Tan to Chiang. He notes, "In 1926, I sent an army north and the general public elected Mr. Chiang Kai-shek to serve as the Commander-in-Chief. In reality, Mr. Tan had more prestige, seniority, and history, and in every respect, was superior to Chiang."²⁵ The tone of this comparison, combined with Hu's praise for Tan's modesty and unambitious nature, suggest that the explicit admiration for Tan is also an implicit critique of Chiang. Perhaps Hu exaggerates Tan's strengths and minimizes his weaknesses in order to serve this underlying goal.

Hu also characterizes Tan as a cultured and learned individual who enjoyed food and drink; this also is perhaps an oblique criticism of Chiang Kai-shek's ascetic behavior. Hu notes, "Tan was always a big eater who loved to drink. Therefore when he found doctors, if they would allow him to eat and drink freely, he would call them sensible. But if they gave him restrictions, he would not listen to them, saying, 'In the past I have eaten and drunk many wrong things, so why forbid them now?'"²⁶ In this portrayal, Tan's affection for food is less about his snobbish tastes, and more about the value he places on concrete pleasures. According to Hu, "Mr. Tan believed that death is a change that comes for all things, and cannot be escaped. If the spirit of joy and sorrow are calculated against preserving one's life, if moderation is necessary, then this is not a life that has joy in it."²⁷

Hu's use of Tan's life to critique Chiang parallels the narratives found in *Anecdotes* and *Political History*, as they all construct a history in order to make a broader point about the present. His use of Tan here makes him into something less than complex individual, and transforms his life into a stereotype to serve another aim. In the same way, Li and Tao use the story of the early republic to comment on the political circumstances in which they were writing. As historians continue to critique and reconstruct these narratives and sources, this is a point well worth remembering.

The persistence of networked interests from the pre-1911 era, as represented by the interactions between Tan Yankai, Zhao Hengti, and their peers, was replaced by ideologically oriented mass politics in a commitment to transcend personal relationships and provincial boundaries. Texts like *Political History* and *Anecdotes* were informed by, and themselves informed, a set of values and norms that constructed a new standard for revolutionarily correct

²⁵ Ibid., 24. Original: 當十五年我出師北伐，公舉蔣介石先生任總司令，其實譚先生的資望歷史，都比蔣先生好。

²⁶ Ibid., 25. Original: 譚先生從前豪飲健飯，因此凡找到醫生，如果許他飲食自如的，便以這位醫生為通達，如果為他多立戒條的，他便以為不行。他說：「我以前已經吃錯喝錯，何必現在戒它，反令我感受痛苦呢？」

²⁷ Ibid. 26. Original: 在譚先生抱定生與死為萬物變化之迹—為人之所不能逃，如果悅之惡之神之為苟全命計，勉強節制，便全然沒有生趣了。

behavior that was epistemologically different from the political behaviors practiced before. As a result, the vision of constitutionally informed federalism that first Tan, then Zhao, attempted to espouse was swiftly eclipsed by the attractions of a more stable centralized party-state. Their proposals, as well as the limited successes achieved via gradual reform as opposed to radical and violent revolution, have been ignored by the history of the “warlord era.”

Indeed, depictions of the “warlord era” often fall into one of two camps, both of which are challenged by a reevaluation of historical events as described in this dissertation. The first of these has Zhao as a warlord pushing out Tan as a civilian, signaling the militarization of modern China and the descent into endemic warfare. This is an oversimplified narrative that strains to connect the ostensible militarization of the post-Taiping Qing with the wars with Japan and the KMT-CCP civil war in a continuity of violence, but overlooks the efforts made by Tan and Zhao alike to build upon the traditions of the past. In the second, the period between 1912 and 1927 is seen as an aberration between two stable societies. Here, the rupture represented by the era is inherently unstable, and the heavily centralized imperial state of the Qing as well as the even more heavily centralized party-states of the KMT and CCP represent the only viable configuration of society that can hold China together.

Yet when we look at the period on its own merits, without straining to find its root causes in the past or its consequences for the future, a different picture appears. It was during this period that the former subjects of the Qing empire emerged from the yoke of formal central government control, signaling an intellectual space in which new models of government could be tried. Attempting to tie these experiments tightly to the past is a worthy pursuit, but obscures the merits of these innovative efforts. So too with trying to make claims about the influence of these years on the central party-state of the KMT and CCP to come; searching for the connection of this period to the future causes us to ignore the paths not taken only because they failed.

Of course, seen from another light, the period was closely connected to the past and the future. On the level of culture, as Levenson, Esherick and Rankin, and others have persuasively argued, the ideas of the past retained a high level of influence on Tan, Zhao, and their peers, which prevented them from fully embracing new ideologies and social theories that may have been more productive for bringing peace to society and stability to the economy.²⁸ This dissertation has further argued that the culture of elite politics, and circles of elite networks, continued to play an important role in the years of the early republic. Furthermore, the political failures of this period influenced subsequent periods by serving as a negative example for the highly centralized states that would rule the nation in the future, exemplifying the dangers of too much freedom over local government, and too little control.

Isolating the 1920 mutiny as a specific event, as it occurred in this particular place, has afforded this dissertation a greater degree of nuance. The larger power struggle in Hunan as well as the specific mutiny that prompted the Tan-Zhao transition in the fall of 1920 might certainly mirror similar events in other regions, but cannot possibly represent the broader whole, and the myriad experiences of those living in the former Qing empire. In this, this dissertation parallels recent scholarship that disaggregates the nation from the state, and

²⁸ Levenson, *Confucian China*; Joseph Esherick and Mary Rankin, eds., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1990)

emphasizes the variety of lived experiences in history. For the “modern” period after 1800 in particular, new scholarship on non-Han ethnic groups like Muslims, the Manchu or the Miao demonstrates that prior understandings of legal, social, cultural, and economic interactions among Qing subjects and twentieth-century citizens has understated the importance of ethnic diversity within what we now call China.²⁹ Research on borderlands topics during the Qing highlights a similar point concerning the diversity of experiences across space during an ostensibly unitary state.³⁰ Even when the space is limited to a place like Shanghai, scholars have suggested that differences of class or gender strongly inform a remarkably different set of experiences.³¹ The Chinese experience was not and is not uniform; the years of the warlord period, when a feeble centralized state governed the nation in name alone, epitomizes this point.

Indeed, studying the warlord period as a whole needs to be interpreted critically, as each year brought a new set of challenges and circumstances. In Hunan specifically, the years between 1911 and 1920 were all quite different from each other: for example, the violence and tyranny that is said to have characterized the tenure of rulers like Tang Xiangming or Zhang Jingyao contrast sharply with the relative peace of other leaders like Tan or Zhao. Yet when the era is remembered, it is mostly with reference to local bullies who took what they wanted and left only chaos and sadness in their wake. There is a reason for this; this dissertation does not advance the claim that these years were some sort of golden era that has been overlooked by historians. It is worth repeating here Jerome Ch'en's poignant remarks to all who study this period: “I have suffered at their [warlord] hands when I was a young citizen of China. If anyone comes to tell me, ‘these chaps were not so bad after all,’ my advice to him or her is to change hypothesis rather than reality.”³² It is fairly clear that most, if not all, who lived through and survived this period did not remember it fondly. This dissertation has not tried to correct these memories, but rather to suggest that there was contingency for different types of futures, and also room for other perspectives as well.

²⁹ See, for example, Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: Identity and History in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Mark Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Seattle, WA.: University of Washington Press, 2000); Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*, (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2011)

³⁰ Examples include Matthew Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2013); Kwangmin Kim, *Borderland Capitalism: Turkestan Province, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2016); Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2017)

³¹ Examples include Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949*, (Stanford, CA, 1986); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) S.A. Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2002); Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2007)

³² Jerome Ch'en, *The Military-Gentry Coalition: China Under the Warlords*, (Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Center on Modern East Asia, 1979), iii.

A major issue with historical memory, writ large, is in the paradigms and vocabulary that dominate our thinking about the period. In these stories, modernity and progress is concentrated in the relative havens of the cities and urban areas, particularly along the coasts and rivers, with the rural remainder depicted as an economic and cultural backwater whose refusal to embrace the western modernity prevents the nation as a whole from progressing. In our urge to arrive at a broader argument concerning these years and how they fit into the larger scope of Chinese, East Asian, and world history, we are too eager to repeat and regurgitate formulaic tropes about the state, modernity, and tradition. Scholars have begun to rethink the way that May Fourth paradigms and tropes have influenced our understanding of Chinese traditions, and this, too, should extend to remnants of traditional elite culture that remained during the Beiyang period.

Instead of ascribing to conventional spatial and temporal categories of coastal, modern, and progressive in opposition to hinterland, backwards, and regressive, this dissertation argues that it is the confluence of different ideas that help to generate knowledge production, such as information and experimentation with federalism and constitutionalism. The synergy of new ideas could occur even in a so-called conservative context such as Hunan.

Of course, historians have often had to grapple with the diversity of experience during the warlord era and to acknowledge it; on that point, what this dissertation is claiming is not entirely new. With the exception of a few efforts to make larger claims and characterizations of the period, the majority of historians situate their work around specific individuals, places, or factions.³³ Nevertheless, these works often try to relate their stories to the larger whole. Instead of finding significance through aggregation, this dissertation has tried instead to disaggregate space and time into incremental pieces, and to question each piece of information. The point is that the “warlord era” is significant not for its connection to the rest of Chinese history; it is significant as a time of multiple contingencies that do not fit within state-led teleological conceptions of what China was, is, or could ever become.

Closely examining the 1920 Pingjiang Mutiny, its causes, and its consequences demonstrates that this event has been retroactively interpreted to fit revolutionary narratives of warlord betrayal and local government incompetence. This dissertation has used unpublished materials like post office policies, provincial assembly petitions, diaries, letters, and English-language exercise books, to challenge these conventional histories and suggest the successes, however limited, enjoyed by gradual reform as opposed to radical revolution. These small victories, like the federalist movement, have been overlooked not only because they do not fit the standard narrative, but also because Tan and Zhao were relatively weak at publicizing their policies in a way that appealed to the emerging mass politics of the era compared to the political ideologues who succeeded them.

In contrast to these mundane successes, the spectacle and drama of mutiny—which ostensibly features the triumph of a *wu*-warlord over a *wen*-bureaucrat—would seem to epitomize the eroding politics of the new nation, desperately in need of centralization and

³³ The exceptions might be Ch'en's "Military-Gentry Coalition" and Ch'i's, "Warlord Politics." Lary's "Warlord Soldiers" also provides a broad overview, but from a much different, bottom-up, perspective. Studies of individuals include McCormick, *Zhang Zuolin*, Sheridan, *Feng Yu-hsiang*, Gillin, *Yen Hsi-shan*, and Wou, *Militarism in Modern China*; studies of places include Sutton, *Provincial Militarism*, and McCord, *Power of the Gun*; studies of factions include Waldron, *From War to Nationalism* and Lary, *Region and Nation*.

order. Closely examining the mutiny shows that this is far from the case, since Zhao had little to do with Tan's downfall. Indeed, rather than Zhao Hengti betraying Tan Yankai and forcing him into exile, this transition was mainly caused by Tan's overambitious efforts to strengthen his position in Pingjiang. The situation exacerbated further by KMT agents sent by Sun Yatsen in Guangzhou, who conspired to undermine Tan's rule.

In this light, the eventual failure of federalism and gradual reform in Hunan, and their eclipse in revolutionary history appears even more tragic. There was nothing inevitable about turmoil in Hunan, just as there was nothing inevitable about the revolutions that changed China. Provincial autonomy and the federalist movement did not gain greater currency in the early republic because those who effectively employed the new rhetoric of mass politics and eventually rose to the top favored central governance, and not, as some have postulated, because the culture and the people were inured to autocratic rule, or particularly ill-suited for republican representation. This is a point well worth considering for future scholarship seeking to move beyond the revolutionary paradigm of Chinese history.

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